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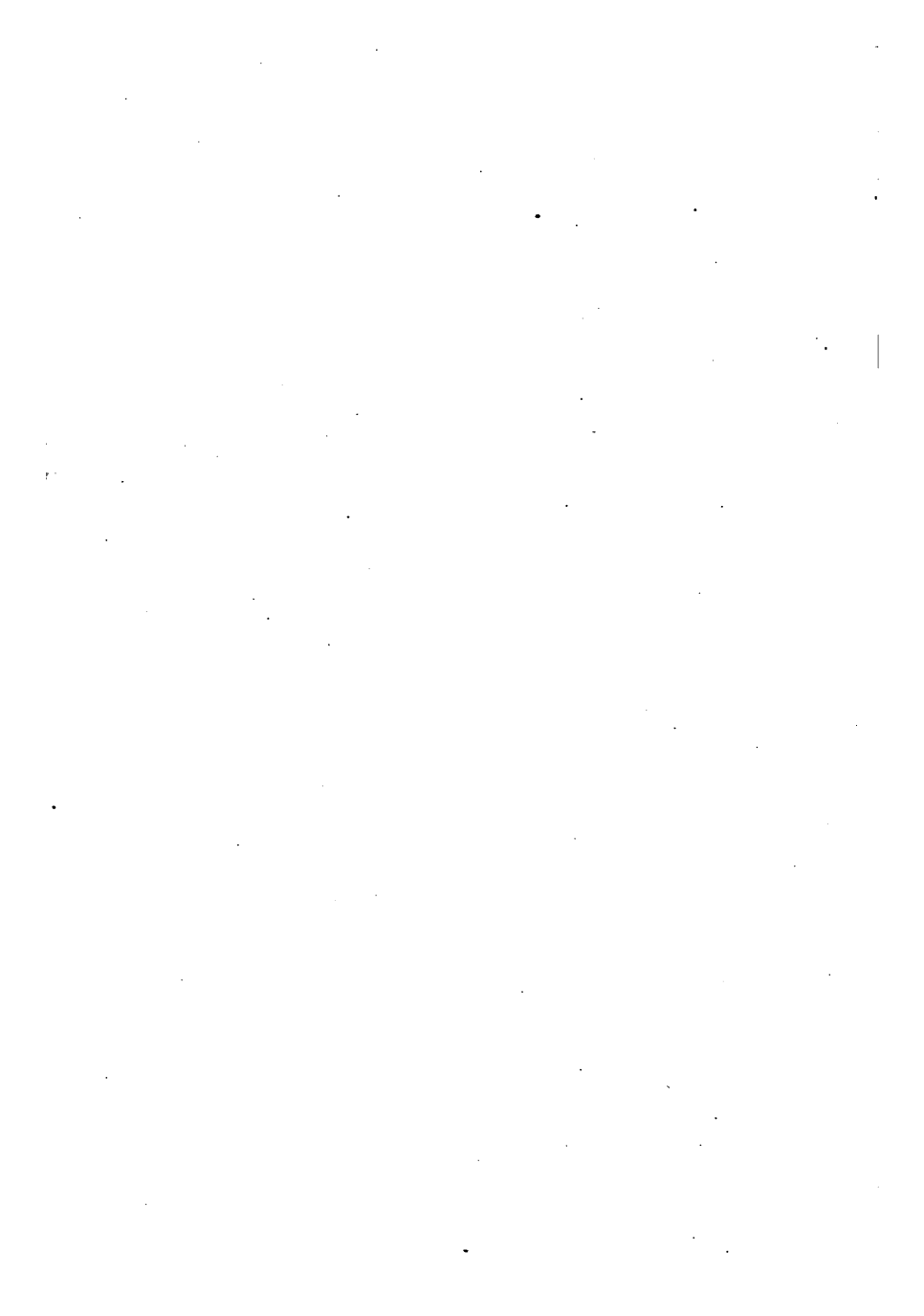
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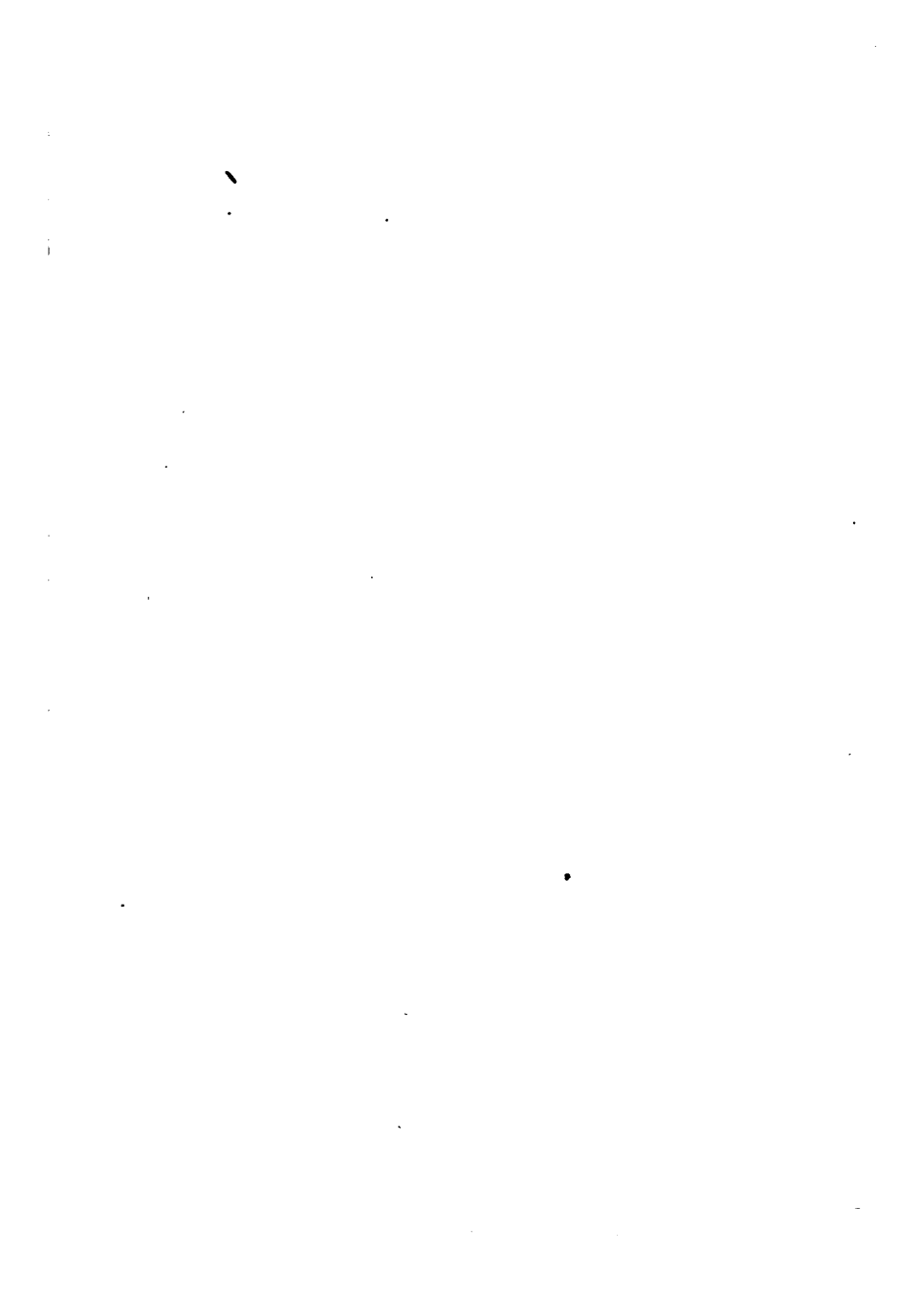
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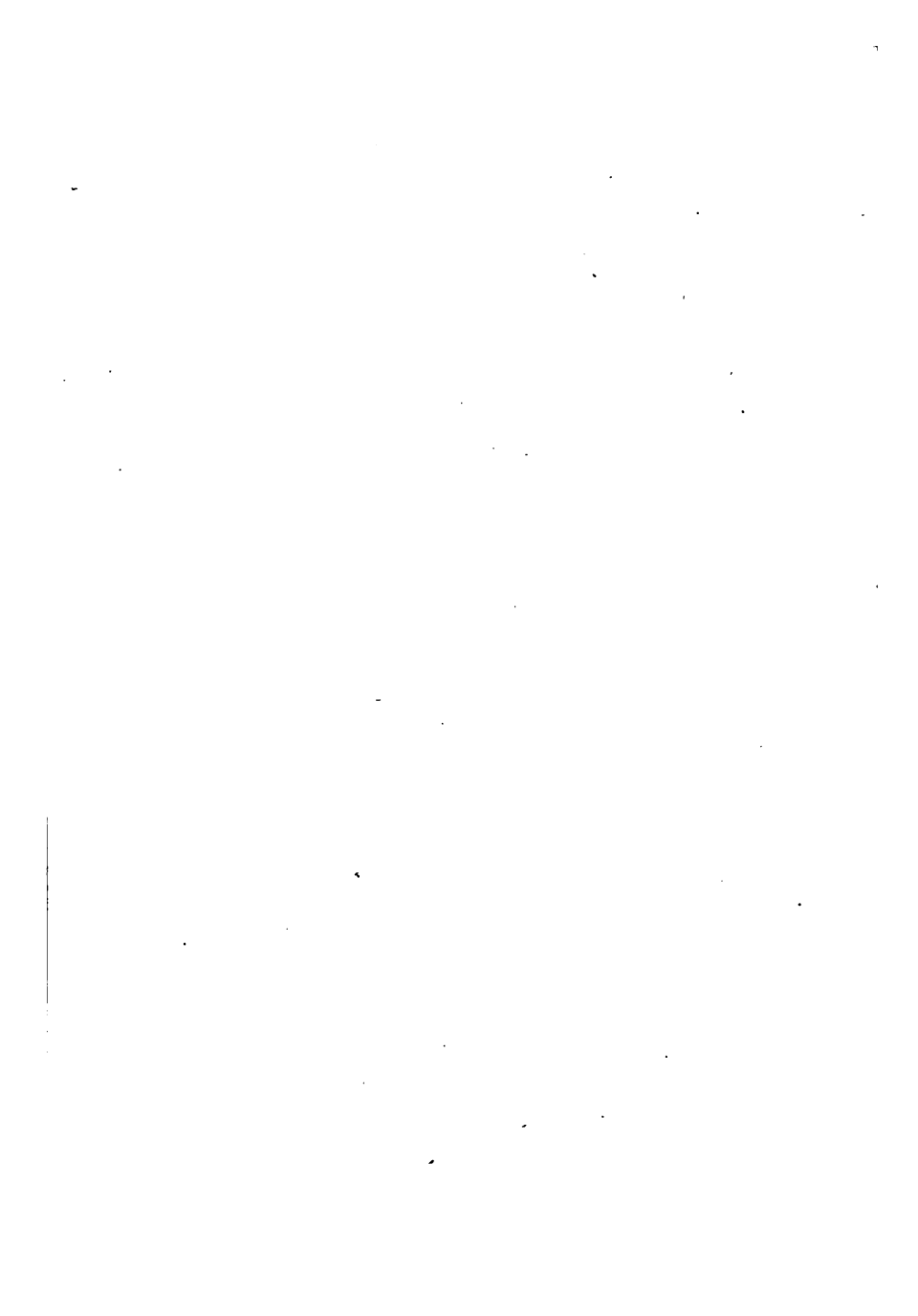
Culinary Collection

Gift of Barbara Wheaton

1875









The Cooking Club. Page 22.

THE COOKING OF

TE-WIT HOLLIS

BY

ELLA FARRAR

CHIEF OF THE "ALICE" HOUSE
KANSAS



Boston:

Published by D. Lothrop & Co.

Dover, N. H.: G. T. Day & Co.



THE COOKING CLUB

OF

TU-WHIT HOLLOW.

BY

ELLA FARMAN.

AUTHOR OF THE "ALLIE BIRD SERIES," "A WHITE
HAND," &c.



Boston:

Published by D. Lothrop & Co.

Dover, N.H.: G. T. Day & Co.

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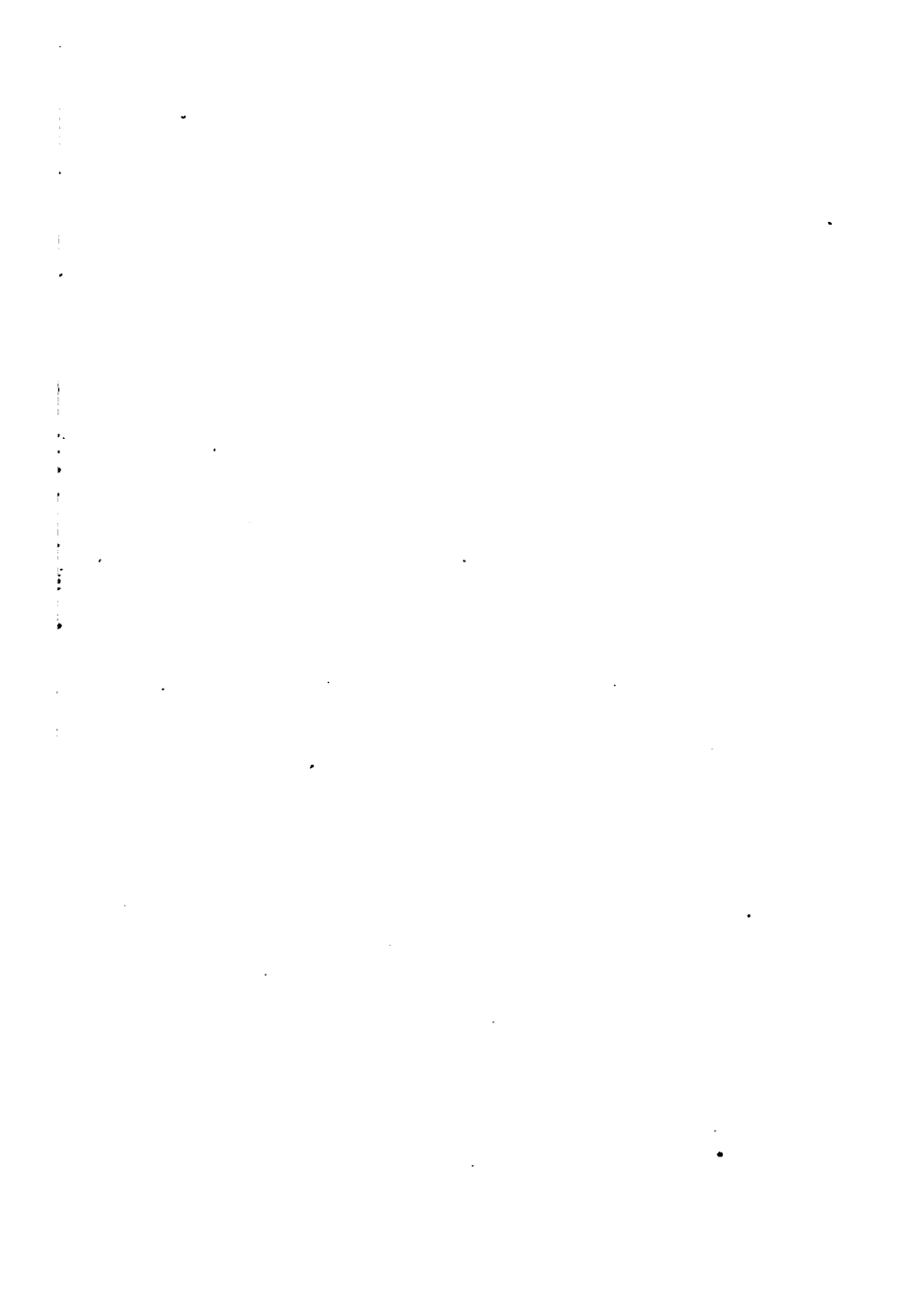
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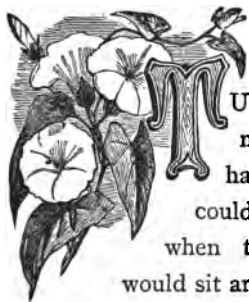


THE COOKING CLUB .

OF TU-WHIT HOLLOW.

CHAPTER I.

THE DIAMOND BOWL.



MU-WHIT HOLLOW took its name from the owls that used to haunt the spot. Eight or ten could be heard there of a night, when the country was new. They would sit around in the trees as if the trees were great congressional arm-chairs, and call out to each other, as if they were an investigating com-

mittee, "To whit? To who?" They would pass those questions around the circle again and again. Then they would wake up the innocent birds in their nests roundabout, and ask them, "To who? To who?"

But not an owl of them, to my knowledge, ever satisfactorily told "to who." Which of them had accepted a bribe or a share is still a mystery to the people of the Hollow, who used to listen to them night in and night out. Perhaps the bribe was given "to Whit," as many of the owls said. But, like other innocent members of investigating committees, "Whit" would ruffle his feathers, and swell in the neck, and inquire, "To who? To who?" so indignantly, as if he could not believe his ears, that he always flew off to the safe woods with the rest of them in the morning, scot free. But the name of the great fuss and uproar stuck to the Hollow, just as bad reputations will stick to persons and places.

Tu-whit Hollow was in the back country. It was a great, green bowl among the hills. It held about a thousand acres, and was set twice around with perfect gems of homes. All around the rim, on the hill-sides, it was dotted with handsome farm-houses; and farther down there was another smaller circle of farms, with pretty houses, white, and buff, and wood-colored. Right in the centre (at the bottom of the bowl, you

know) was the most beautiful gem of the whole, the Koh-i-noor, in fact. You all know that Queen Victoria's most precious diamond is called the "Koh-i-noor," and that the word means "Mountain of Light." That was the name this gem of the great green bowl went by—the Koh-i-noor School-house; and in some sessions of school it was a "mountain of light."

You must be told, that by the time the new school-house was built, all the Tu-whit Hollow people had found out that they were living in a most beautiful spot. The picture painters had discovered the place, and had often been there to paint it. They had told the farmers that their portion of the country was like a great fairy bowl set with gems, and had taken them up on the mountains, and bade them look down on the delightful landscape.

So the people had grown proud of their home, and were twice as happy as they were before the artists had come, and pointed out to them the beauty that had always lain at their doors. Some of the more ambitious had even tried to change the name of the place, and call it the Diamond Bowl instead of Tu-whit Hollow; but the bad name stuck. It is so hard to get a bad name off! and harder still to get a good name to stick in the place of it.

The new school-house was beautiful. When it came

to be built, everybody was willing to be taxed in order that it might be made so beautiful it would not disgrace the famous scenery. It turned out to be a credit both to the people and to the landscape. It was well proportioned, had a turreted belfry and a bracketed cornice. It was painted a clear, dainty gray. It had lovely windows that would open in the middle like doors ; and it had, on the outside, a long, green, latticed veranda for the children to play in on stormy days ; and inside, in place of the old-fashioned counters and benches, it had, O ! the most cunning ash and walnut chairs, with fairy-like desks in front. It was such a lovely, refined school-room that the children brought flowers, and instinctively kept it like a parlor.

Indeed, the house exerted such an influence upon the entire district that the parents were quite willing to be taxed again to have the grounds graded, and fenced with a graceful iron fence, and to buy maples and evergreens, and a most sweet-toned bell. Then they selected a spring day, and called it "Arbor Day." Upon that day every man, woman, and child went down to the school-house to help set the trees. When the last one was planted, sweet Marion Halliday went in, and rung the bell ; and while the bell was ringing, the people of the Diamond Bowl raised their hats,

and bonnets, and "clouds," and swung them, and named the building the "Koh-i-noor School-house."

Then they gave the name a rousing "three times three," and went home as happy and neighborly as public-spirited people generally are. And they were not a little flattered to be known thereafter, far and near, as the "Koh-i-noor District;" and they were ready always afterwards, as a consequence, to interest themselves in everything that was bright, and good, and pleasant, having something of a reputation to sustain. Even their roads and bridges grew better. They wished everything to harmonize with their school-house.





CHAPTER II.

HOW THERE CAME TO BE A COOKING CLUB.

WELL, there came to be a cooking club in the district because a certain intellectual little girl, with restless feet and hands, thought that Tu-whit Hollow was an exceedingly dull place in the winter time. This winter there had been very little snow. She had not had a single sleigh-ride ; and there was no good, safe ice upon the ponds. And now "school was out." She had been at home all the week so far. Friday she told her mother it was "very dreadfully dull."

For herself, her mother did not think so. But there were many other little girls, and their mothers with them, who openly agreed with Lolly Sumner.

Of course, her real name was Laura. "Lolly" was the lovingly-bestowed nickname which her friends had given her. Even her father and mother nearly al-

ways called her by it ; so did her teachers. There is something in nicknames ; you may be sure a disagreeable girl would not have got called "Lolly." Laura herself liked the name ; this very morning she had said so to her mother.

" 'Lolly' is such a warm little name ! Do you know I always feel a great ways off from you, mother, when you call me 'Laura' ? "

"That is the philosophy of such little names — of the nice ones, I mean, of course," said her mother, with a smile.

"Is there a philosophy to such things — to words ? I thought philosophy was just about steam-engines, and sealing-wax, and levers. That is what it is at school, mother."

Mrs. Sumner pointed to a great book which lay open upon a little round stand. There was nothing else upon this stand, for the book itself quite covered it. It was Webster's Unabridged Dictionary. Mrs. Sumner kept it within reach in this way, where it never need be lifted. She sent her little daughter to it a dozen times each day ; a dozen other times Lolly went to it without being told. Mrs. Sumner never refrained from using the "large, proper words of educated people," as Lolly called them, in conversation with her little ten-year-old daughter ; instead she thus

daily taught her the uses and resources of the English language.

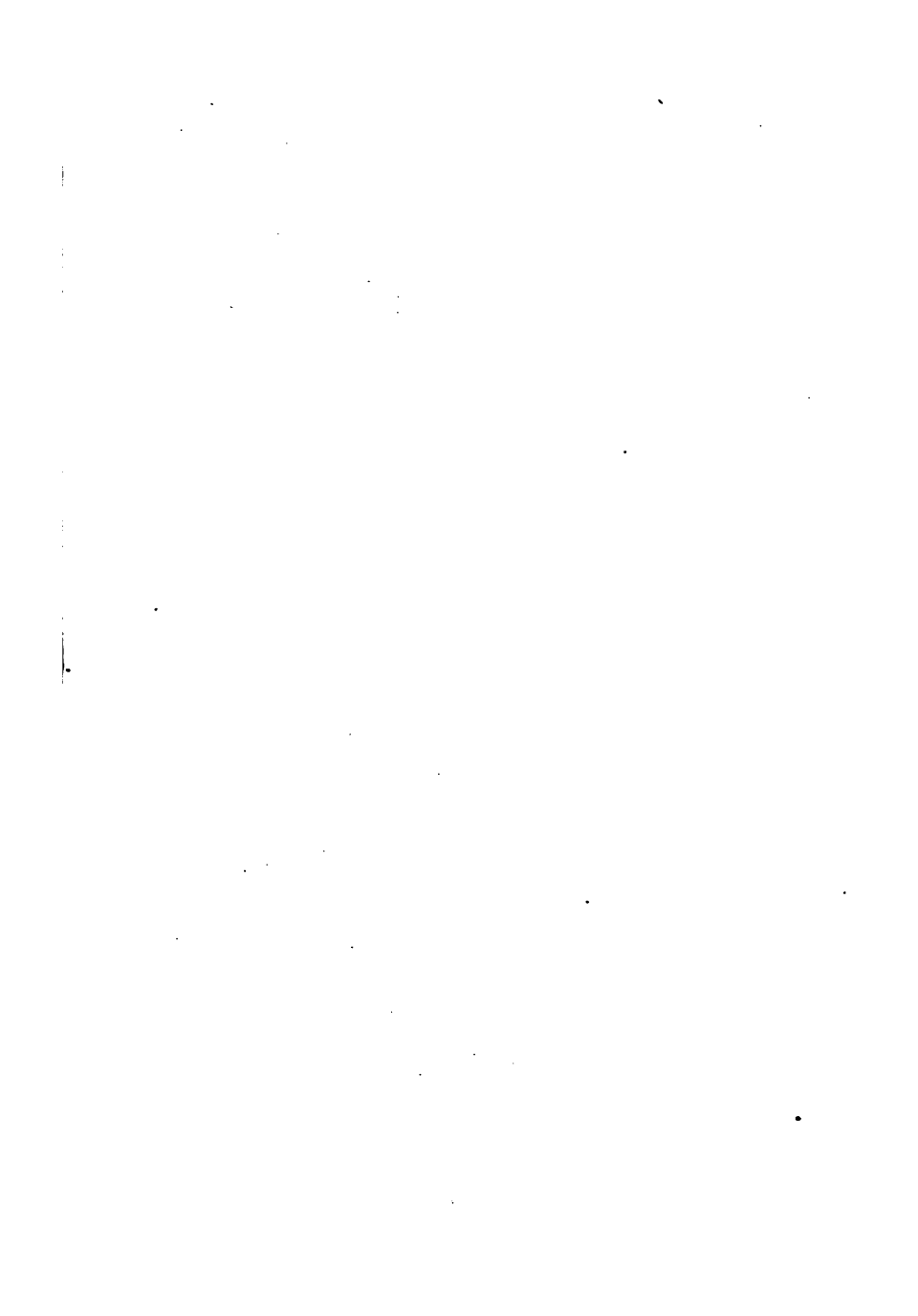
Lolly went to the "Dictionary stand," and turned the leaves to "P," over to "Phe," and finally to "Phi." She ran over the definitions, and at last read aloud to her mother the two which her young mind had seized upon as being "to the point," —

"An explanation of the reasons of things ; an investigation of the causes."

She came back to her mother's side, thinking of the other definitions she had not read aloud. "Mercy ! What a great, wide word it is, mother ! I understand it, though. But don't you think I could keep understanding it best if I should just say, 'It is the reason why' ? You know, mother, short words seem best with short dresses."

"Yes, my dear, and with long dresses too, if you can make a short word hold the thought."

Lolly went to the window. She concluded her wise "short words." had not quite held the whole meaning of the term "philosophy." She watched the cold clouds, looked at the bare, frozen ground, and felt discontented. She considered the trouble she was going to have if she persisted in her private ambition to become a great scholar. It grew worse every day. No sooner did she think she was the mistress of a bit





And wrote her name on it with the head of a pin. Page 15.

of learning than another door would fly open "right in the same house," and she would have to explore farther.

She had studied so hard all winter that her head had got the habit of aching over any bit of difficulty with a word or a problem. She turned from the word "philosophy" now, and wished there was nothing but play in the world, and that there was some to be had that minute.

She twisted about restlessly, and finally she breathed on the window-pane, and wrote her name on it with the head of a pin—a dear and forbidden pleasure.

"Lolly, my dear!"

Lolly put the pin back under her belt; but she fidgeted with the curtain fixtures until her mother exclaimed, "Why, what is the matter, Lolly? What are you thinking that makes you so uneasy, and so unpleasant for me to look at?"

Lolly came away from the window. "I'm not thinking, mother; I'm tired of thinking. I want something outside of my mind. I don't want to *be* so much; I want to *do*. I am an awfully active little verb, mother, and if you don't find something for me to exercise myself upon, I shall—why, I know I shall boil all up, and fizz, and burn, and spoil, as the hot lard does on the stove when the cakes aren't ready."

Mrs. Sumner thought this was only too probable. She suggested that Miss Leonie Leocadie, a very pink and smiling young lady, who sat in her cloak and furs upon the sofa, would be in need of summer raiment long before her mistress would have it ready.

Lolly walked slowly over to her work-basket, and unrolled a dress-pattern of pink silk. She stood, snipping her scissors, and looking at it. "Mother, if you are to be shut up with her a week at a time, a doll is too still. I want—why, mother, don't you know anything about us little girls? We want some noise; a girl can't live without some noise, and some stir, and some fun, no more than a boy can. I just hate Tu-whit Hollow in the winter after school lets out; that I do! In town, girls go out on the walks, and see each other, and contrive to have something going on; they get together as much as if there was a school. Why, mother, can't you remember how I feel? I do wish I could make the little girl you used to be hear what I say; she'd know."

"The little girl she used to be" and the mother both knew what Lolly meant. If Mrs. Sumner had not been so rich in her own mind with knowledge, and with thoughts, and memories, and hopes; if she had not also had the power of going out by the pathway of books into other richer minds; and if she had

not had a way of living her husband's life for him, and seeing where she could help him, and make him happier, and of living her little daughter's life for her, and seeing where she could help her, and make her happier, — she, too, might have thought that the beautiful Diamond Bowl was but a dull cavern in winter time, just as poor, over-studious, restless little Lolly did.

And in fact "the little girl" that Mrs. Sumner "used to be" was not a dead-and-buried little girl, but had lived right along in a place where nothing ever grew old or faded; and she was that moment bright, and warm, and smiling in Mrs. Sumner's heart, sympathizing with Lolly, and making various suggestions in her behalf.

Mrs. Sumner admitted to herself that she had made some mistakes in crowding her little daughter among books; that probably Lolly did need more stir, and fun, and, yes, perhaps "some noise." She considered how she might "get her together" with her mates.

"Would you like a spelling-school some evening here in the sitting-room? It might be made something very nice."

Lolly thought a moment, and shook her head.

"Or a debating society, like the older scholars? You and your friends could dispose of many of your

troubles ; for instance, 'Resolved, that school vacations are a national evil, and should be dispensed with.'"

Lolly studied the gently-quizzical expression upon her mother's face. She herself smiled a little. "No ; I don't want anything for the mind, mother. I want some fun, something altogether jolly, with lots of stir-about in it."

Mrs. Sumner saw that her child craved exercise and fun, just as physical disease often really craves the right means of cure, just as the liver, in some states of wrong action, craves lemon or other acid. She grew very earnest about the matter, since home amusements were not to answer.

"Well, how would you like to be an aid society, the Koh-i-noor Aid Society, and go out soliciting, and send boxes to the city poor?"

We will do Lolly justice, and say that she thought a long time concerning this ; but she finally shook her head. "No, mother, I don't think I would like it—not quite. Now that you've set out to help me, I want something new—at least, something nobody round here ever has heard of. Of course, I wouldn't mind its being improving, or somebody's getting some good out of it, if it is only awfully jolly for us while

we are doing it. Can't you understand me, dear mother?"

Mrs. Sumner understood. O, yes! but, wise as she was, it taxed her wits to the utmost to come up to her little daughter's requirements. All at once a paragraph of yesterday's reading darted through her mind. She took a moment to digest her plan. Then she said, "How would you like a cooking club, Lolly?"

"A cooking club, mother?"

"Yes, a cooking club—a series of little daytime parties for you and the other girls. They will be given, first at one house, and then at another. You all will wear your every-day dresses. You will cook your own refreshments while at the club. Do you comprehend? and do you like it?"

Lolly did comprehend. Her face was bright. "O mother! mother! mother! mother!" she sang.

In fact, the grand moment would admit of nothing less than song.

Mrs. Sumner smiled. "Yes, it truly will be an affair of 'mother.' The mother at each house must teach and provide. I will see the ladies for you tomorrow, Lolly; and if they approve, we will organize our little daughters into a cooking club."

"But, mother, did you mean to say that we will

have nothing *at all* to eat at those parties excepting what we cook ourselves?" Lolly's tone and look were somewhat anxious.

"I did mean to say so, my dear."





CHAPTER III.

AS RELATED BY THE PRESIDENT.

PURSUANT to order — there, I fancy that sounds official — pursuant to order, on last Monday afternoon, we girls met over at Fan Ledyard's, and wrote down our names to be a Cooking Club. I was chosen President. Marion Halliday proposed me, and I went by acclamation. And what do you think? I am the only officer.

We should probably have had others, though, if it had not been for that pert Bobby Ledyard — and his mother, I may as well add. If I'd been his sister, that boy wouldn't have been in the room at all; and as for Mrs. Ledyard — well, I'm glad *my* mother is a sweet, dignified, Christian lady.

But there Bobby was, sitting upon the table, when we first went in. He said he'd preside until somebody was elected to take the place. And when I was put in

president, he got down, — ridiculous, red-cheeked little apple-face ! — and crooked his elbow, and offered to “conduct me to the chair” ! And I was so flustered with the idea of being a president, that that boy actually got my hand, and was leading me toward the table, and, I truly believe, would have had me perched on top of it, just as he had been, if the girls hadn’t set up a laugh, and Mrs. Ledyard cried out, “Why, Bobby !” Then I saw what I was about, and ran back. How ashamed I was ! His mother set him down in a chair pretty smartly ; but that wasn’t the end of his impudence ; no, indeed !

The next move, Caddy Golden rose and nominated herself for Secretary ! — *herself* ! ! only think of it !

Of course, as it was a public meeting, we tried to be polite ; but some of the girls turned to each other and made faces, and then giggled. Caddy writes the nicest hand in school, and I suppose thought it would be only suitable. But she doesn’t know a thing else ; only just enough to make a beautiful courtesy, and do her hair nice, and loop her skirts in all the late styles. She is a perfect goose at talking upon a subject, *and always believes just what you tell her* ! I dare say some mischievous person told her to nominate herself.

I seconded her, however, for Caddy was the one

who had seconded me. Caddy *is* good-natured, *too* good-natured, *I* think. But Mrs. Ledyard, who, as a grown-up person, ought to be above such things, — I'm sure *my* mother would never have a grudge against a little girl, — but Mrs. Ledyard really does seem to like to humble Caddy, and just because she dresses so exquisitely, although she tries to keep Fanny up with her, as near as she can, — well, Mrs. Ledyard spoke right up, "Nobody ever nominates themselves, Caddy; it isn't pretty! You will be laughed about everywhere. Besides, I don't see any mortal use for a secretary!"

"O, put in every girl special reporter!" cried that Bobby.

Caddy's face was as red as it could be, and she looked all around to see whether anybody was laughing, I suppose. "I thought some one ought to write down the good recipes," she said, which really was the most sensible thing I ever heard Cad Golden say. Perhaps I don't like Caddy very well myself; but I trust I have always treated her well; because for a dozen girls to band together against one, just because she wears lovely poplins and camel's-hair cloth, and has Valenciennes, and relatives in New York city, is mean, — yes, *mean*! We'd be glad to wear Valenciennes, if we could; I know *I* should. It does make

a pretty cheek and a delicate throat and chin so much more delicate. If I ever come down on Caddy, it is not in public, you may be sure. Still, as I am putting down things as they are, I must say that she is not "overly smart." I am afraid I was willing to let her get out of her embarrassment the best way she could, when Marion Halliday spoke: "We really ought, all of us, to be secretaries, in the way Caddy has suggested. It's a good idea. Let's all have receipt-books!"

How flattered Caddy did look! Dear Marion! she always is the one to pour the oil on the troubled waters. I wonder why we don't join and hate *her* for her soft voice, and sweet smile, and lady-like ways — for the rest of us haven't them any more than we have Cad's thread laces or Fifth Avenue cousins. Well, I suppose I shall understand the difference between envy and admiration when I come to study moral philosophy!

Then Mary Graham spoke about a treasurer. It was so absurd, as there was no money in the case, that I spoke right out, "What for?"

And that nasty Bobby Ledyard laughed. "Ho! ho! I'll tell you the kind of treasurer you want, seein' it's for pies and things; you just want to see that there's a good ditch somewhere near; that's all the treas-

urer you'll need. I eat a pie Fan made once ! Ho ! ho ! ”

That boy thought he was witty ! Really, if it had been at the house of a good-natured woman, I should, as president, have requested that Bobby leave the room. I felt my cheeks swelling up and growing hot, and before I knew it I had tapped with my foot, and said, “ The room will please come to order ! ” Nellie Crane told me, coming home, that I looked like a real officer as I did it. I know that that boy “ settled,” and that the girls all clapped their hands, and that, altogether, it was a moment not to be forgotten.

Mrs. Ledyard looked miffed ; and I shall always think she was going to say something real ugly to me. But Marion spoke in the nick of time.

“ And now, Miss President,” said she, rising, with a ridiculous little bow to me, “ I suppose we are a Club ; and, that you may not be wholly unsupported, I herewith appoint myself Chief Suggester and First Gold-Stick in Waiting to your Excellencissima ! ” and then she flourished a little, after the manner of an Eastern salaam, and put herself at my elbow. Then up she jumped again. “ I also appoint Caddy Golden to be Second Gold-Stick in Waiting ! ” and she winked Caddy over to my other elbow. Wasn't it ridiculous ? But Caddie's wounds were healed all the same. Mari-

on is the oldest girl in school, at least six years older than I am. She learns common branches there, and the extras at home. But she never puts on airs with us ; and we all quite glory in the good sense and the good grammar of what she says, and the way she keeps us "under her thumb."

Then up she jumps again, while I sat thinking how nice it was in her to be so sweet to us younger ones. "I will now suggest to your Serene Highness that you appoint us a time and place !"

Dear me ! she was so sweet and so ridiculous, that I didn't mind her little hint that I wasn't quite up to my office. I tried at once to collect my thoughts. Mother had told me what to do in case I was elected president, as I thought I should be ; for wasn't the Club our own plan, — mother's and mine ? And, too, mother had owned that there was a sort of courtesy about such things, and that probably I should be the president. I was so certain of it myself, that I had composed a little speech to make. I sat still now just long enough to remember it through once, and then I stood up. I tried my best to rise in mother's easy way, which I had often practiced.

"Ladies, I am much obliged for the compliment you have paid me. And now I would propose that our first meeting be for the purpose of 'setting

bread.' I think we should begin with bread, since some great and good person — I don't know who, I am sure — has immortalized himself by saying that 'bread is the staff of life.' " —

"Hear! hear! O, do hear!" cried that nasty Bobby, in a loud whisper.

I was put out for a minute, but I went on, though my voice sounded perfectly hollow to myself. With everybody looking at me and paying attention, I felt as if somebody else was using it; indeed, if my memory hadn't acted independently of me, and taken my organs of speech under its control, I don't believe but what I should have broken down. I went on. "Mrs. Halliday, our much respected friend, has kindly offered her house to the Club, and I propose now that we meet there to-morrow evening, and learn to 'set bread.'"

I was sitting down, when my First Gold-Stick hastily whispered me, —

"And the baking of the bread, dear."

I straightened up again. "Furthermore, ladies, on Wednesday forenoon there will be a second session, in order to attend to the baking of this bread."

"I second the motion," cried my Second Gold-Stick, prompted, in a whisper, by the First Gold-Stick.

"All those in favor," suggested the Chief Suggester, in a tiny whisper.

"All those in favor of this will say 'Aye!'"

I sat down then. The room rang with "aye!" "aye!" "And I, too," shouted that boy, above all the rest, "May I be there to see!"

"Thank goodness, you won't!" said I to myself. Everybody, even my First Gold-Stick, forgot to call for the "noes," and so it was over with. My forehead was just wet with drops. Why it should have affected me so, when it was just us Koh-i-noor school-girls, is more than I can tell.

Then, as a Club, we broke up. But as girls we staid a while longer, and talked it over. I found some of them were really disappointed because there were no more officers; and I'm afraid I showed that I was disgusted, for they all turned on *me*,—even Nellie Crane, who didn't want to be an officer herself, at all. Nellie is—O, *so* keen! even I dread that little vitriol tongue of hers.

"You better make faces, Loll Sumner! We've set *you* apart and promoted you, and the very first thing you have no sympathy with any one at all! I heard my father say, only last night, that you take one of the common people, and make a governor, or a general, or even a captain of him, and it changed him into a cold, selfish aristocrat at once, and he didn't care a fig for them that made him, and—and—and,

Lolly Sumner, see, if holding office is going to spoil even a nice girl like you, I say we better break up this Club at once!"

Now, Nellie is my most intimate friend. She loves me dearly. Vitriolic as she had begun, she had ended like honey; there were almost tears in her eyes. I thought, may be, I had acted too important. So I went up and put one arm around her, and the other around Fanny Ledyard, and Marion, who was standing there, put her arm around Fanny too, and the other girls came up, and there we stood in a ring, just as if it was noon down to the school-house. Then Marion talked a little. She said that when even a dozen or so were going to work together, some one must be leader, to decide things, and that *that* lay at the bottom of all government. She had hold of my hand, at the back of Fanny's waist, and just then she gave it a dear little squeeze. Then she went on, still holding my hand in the warm squeeze, and my quick temper, too, for that matter; "and now, girls, if you really don't wish Lolly for your president, let's have the one you do want. I know Lolly herself doesn't care."

And Marion's face was so sweet, and noble, and reproving, and winning, and everything else that makes a girl perfectly lovely, that really I *didn't* care.

And, besides, I seemed to hear mother saying, in that gentle voice of hers, "Lolly, remember, 'in honor preferring one another!'"

But whether I could have held out so humble if the girls hadn't acted toward me just as they did, is more than I can tell. They all spoke up heartily. They did want me, or they wouldn't have chosen me. They all looked at me "so good," too!

But how mortified, yes, and how angry I should have been, if they had put me out of my office!

We all went home good friends, and I was very proud to tell father and mother that I was chosen president. My head was as light as air all the evening. But in the night, when I woke up, and was thinking it over, all at once everything stood out in its true light, and I saw that, in reality, it was our own lovely Marion who had been the president of the Club, just as she always had been of everything else. And I went to sleep, seeing her with a halo around her head, — the crown of the Peacemaker.





CHAPTER IV.

SETTING BREAD.

BY sundown, — a warm, lucent April sundown it was, one of those first ones in spring, which promise lovely, and lovelier, and still lovelier to-morrows, — the girls of the Koh-i-noor district had “got together” at Mrs. Halliday’s.

Mrs. Halliday was a wealthy widow lady, and although highly cultivated intellectually, she was not at all exclusive. While in reality she was the superior of every one in the community, excepting Mrs. Sumner, she was so truly a Christian that her grace and culture never had excited the least envy or malice. Even purse-proud Mrs. Golden respected her, and Mrs. Ledyard had nothing in particular to say.

She had at once approved of Mrs. Sumner’s idea of a Cooking Club. “Certainly. Let us have it by all means. I have taught Marion housekeeping from

babyhood up, just as I began her French and German then. I have great respect for the mechanical processes of memory. All mothers cannot teach their daughters the chemistry of cookery, but they *can* practice them into pretty fair machines for turning out the needful pies, bread, and biscuit."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Sumner. "My dear mother made the best of bread, and yet knew nothing of the chemical how and why of her sweet white loaves all her life through."

"Just so. And did you ever wonder why a perfectly boiled potato is not as attainable by an ignorant cook as good bread sometimes is? If we can teach all the Tu-Whit Hollow daughters how to cook just a potato properly, it will be something. I think they shall come here for their first Club."

The girls were delighted to be invited to Mrs. Halloway's, you may be sure. They were all there. And, with two exceptions, they came in their every-day clothes, as Mrs. Sumner had particularly suggested to their mothers. Mrs. Sumner was quite able to dress expensively; but she always chose to wear a washable dress about her housework. She rejoiced in an abundance of print dresses and aprons, and so did Lolly. Nobody ever saw Mrs. Sumner, or Mrs. Halloway either, for that matter, in a soiled fine dress,

carrying about grease-spots a month old, traces of water-drops, and evidences of dust, stain, and crock, geologic strata through which one could determine the domestic employments six weeks back. No; they were too wholesome, body and soul, for that!

Nice-looking girls these were, too, in their calico dresses, and high-necked, long-sleeved aprons — those dear old-fashioned aprons, may they come back some day! Lolly Sumner had always had them for home wear. She looked so nice in them that the other girls had wanted them, and the other mothers had made them. Fanny Ledyard and Caddy Golden weren't near so charming in their ruffled skirts and fancy polonaises — out there in the great fire-lit kitchen.

The girls in calico clustered together, and looked askance at the two speckled birds. Nellie Crane nudged the president. "Did you ever?"

"Yes, I did. They always do, you know, even to a spelling-school. It's horrid taste. Mother, I know, thinks Mrs. Golden is vulgar."

"My two dears!" said Mrs. Halliday, softly, passing and-overhearing.

But the two dears knew that *she* would never have permitted Marion to go in a fancy dress to a Cooking Club.

"Well, girls," said their hostess to them at last ; for they were standing and sitting about the room, shy, embarrassed, waiting. Thereat Nellie nudged the president. The graceful First Gold-Stick glanced archly at her Serene Highness. The Second Gold-Stick did the same, only soberly. Indeed, they all looked at her ; and, with a very red face indeed, her Excellencissima got upon her feet.

"We will now come to order, and proceed to set bread," she said, in a tremulous voice.

And the tall, graceful First Gold-Stick smiled, and said, "So we will, dear Lolly."

Some of the tiny housewives forthwith rolled up their sleeves. But the wise Mentor of the evening stopped that. "No, girls," she said, very seriously ; "that is the way many a woman catches a death-cold — going out of a heated room into a cold one, with her sleeves rolled. There is no need, unless she is at the old-fashioned wash-tub. Certainly, with the proper utensils, you can cook from A to Z, and not soil your sleeves. Remember this, my dears, and preserve both health and a tasteful appearance. For if you contrive to look neat and tasteful in the kitchen, you will not dislike doing house-work, as so many unreasonably do. And now, what kind of bread do you propose to have made, Miss President ?"

Caddy Golden had brought a covered China bowl with her. It had been placed upon the sitting-room table. Before "Miss President" could reply, she came forward. "Mamma sent a bowl of yeast, with compliments to the Cooking Club," and Caddy put out her foot, with a French step, and made a lovely courtesy. Caddy's courtesies were real works of art.

The girls — well, you know how they looked at each other, probably ; and I am sorry to say that not a soul of them thought of thanking Mrs. Golden, in behalf of the Club, until Mrs. Halliday herself did it for them. She also privately told her daughter, the First Gold-Stick, and her Serene Highness, together with Nellie Crane, that self-possession was a most admirable accomplishment.

Saucy Nellie said, behind her back, that *she* thought a drawing-room courtesy was ridiculous in a country kitchen. Marion assured her that poor Caddy's airs were only the every-day manners of the Golden house, and that Caddy's simplicity of wearing them was evidence of an unspoiled and unaffected nature. But Nellie firmly believed vanity and wealth always went together.

When they came out of the pantry, — and this discussion had lasted but a minute ; for they had all

talked at a time, — Mrs. Halliday was looking at the yeast.

“Hop yeast, Caddy?”

“Yes’m!”

“And that’s all *you* know, Cad Golden,” cried Nellie. “Your mother makes potato yeast, if you please. My mother borrowed some once.”

Caddy colored. “Well, I don’t care, as I know of. Mrs. Halliday, I *thought* it was hop. Any how, our bread is good.”

“So it is, Caddy,” said Marion, kindly.

“That it is,” added the president. “It’s whiter, too, than any woman’s in the Hollow.”

“No, Lolly Sumner, it isn’t!” quickly spoke up Jane Graves. “*My* mother’s is the whitest; it is just like a white velvet bonnet, when it’s cut!”

“Yes, nasty ‘salt risings,’” whispered Nellie. “Mother doesn’t consider salt risings bread fit to eat.”

“I suppose it isn’t, really,” responded the president, sententiously. “That great writer, Harriet Beecher Stowe, says awful things about it—about its decomposing; it is in mother’s *Atlantics*; and mother says it is so!”

“I don’t care! you’re two mean girls, I know that! I like my mother’s bread best of any in the world!

It is mixed with milk, and is so fine, and sweet, and tender! and Harriet Beecher would like it herself, if she had it with my mother's butter and preserves; and I think I shall go home; so there!"

Jane was the youngest member of the Club. A tear stood in each of her blue eyes, and her cheeks were very red indeed. They all crowded round her, and soothed her. Mrs. Halliday herself came to the rescue. "Your mother's bread *is* beautifully white, Janie, and I must say that I like it. There never is anything nicer than her raised biscuits at our picnics. But since Mrs. Golden has kindly sent yeast, we will use that to-night. By the by, would some of you like to make yeast for me? I'm nearly out."

Each disturbed little breast felt the soothing touch. Janie plumed herself and looked around. Caddy Golden came up to Lolly. "You *do* think mother's bread is nice—don't you?"

Now, our superior Lolly hated anybody that angled for compliments in this style, and at the best she had little patience with Caddy's simplicity. She was not at all cordial in her reply. "Ye-es, very white and moist. But it is so white, Caddy, because it is only potato yeast. It is *my* mother's that is perfection, though I didn't care to say anything about it. I think that delicate creamy tint much nicer than white. It

is the hops, and the sugar, and the ginger, that give it that, and that delicious nutty flavor that *your* mother's bread never has, if you re—"

"Who's to make yeast, and who's to set bread?" cried the First Gold-Stick, coming up just here, and quite drowning Lolly's ungracious voice. Indeed, it was high time; for everybody seemed disposed to discuss bread rather than set it,—even Mrs. Halliday herself.

The president repeated the inquiry at once. Caddy Golden, Fanny Ledyard, and Jane Graves stepped to the front as yeast-makers. The rest took up with the lesser honors.

"Do you know how your mother's yeast is made?" inquired Mrs. Halliday.

Caddy blushed. "No, ma'am; but Lolly and Nellie say it's potato yeast."

"I have mother's recipe with me," suggested Lolly.

"O, I'd like to learn *that* way!" cried Nellie. And Mary Graham said Mrs. Sumner's bread was the best she ever ate, and all the girls agreed to that, and the president looked mightily flattered.

But a moment after she took Nellie one side. "Nellie Crane, I'm ashamed of ourselves! Here we are right in Mrs. Halliday's own house, and she knows what good manners are from beginning to end. We

ought to have offered to be taught *her* way! She is a very nice cook, and *such* a lady!"

Nellie thought of it in silence. "Well," she said, slowly, at last, "perhaps, as she is such a lady, she'll consider that we are only little girls!"

When they came back, things were already at a stand-still. The two stylish yeast-makers had come to grief. For the first thing was to go down cellar after potatoes. Potatoes were to be pared, washed, and boiled for both yeast and bread. And was that fit work for little hands, with lace frills falling over them, and apronless, be-ruffled and be-puffed little laps? Caddy, at least, never in her life had touched potatoes, until they were cracking and steaming snowily in the China breakfast tureen.

"Well, then, all long aprons to the rescue!"

Lolly seized the lamp from the helpless girls, pushed them one side, then recollected herself. "Never mind. You can stir the fire, and put on the hops and the potato kettle. Many hands, light work!"

The two flounced girls felt very uncomfortable. But Caddy rushed to the stove, and Fanny sensibly spied out the kettles without asking, filled, and brought them; bringing, however, also, a great spot of crock upon her light-blue skirts. And by the time she reached the stove, Caddy had burnt hers, fixing the fire.

Mrs. Halliday, "smelling a smell," had caught her away. She regarded them both in dismay. "You'll be obliged to leave such things to the calico regiment, my dears!"

"And now for a paring-bee!" cried Lolly, appearing at the head of her laughing troop. Marion produced pans and knives. All the Long Aprons were at work in a trice. Soon parings, wonderful to at least Mrs. Halliday, began to fall in the pans, and potatoes, greatly reduced in size, to splash in the water.

"Have a care, my dears — no splashes! put things down; *never* drop them! And I *must* implore you — what parings! do you know the choicest nutriment of the potato lies next the skin? This is the way I pare potatoes." She pared one as thinly and daintily as if it were an apple, giving them a lesson concerning "eyes," by the way.

Caddy and Fanny stood at the back of the chairs, looking wishfully on. "Why don't you lend a hand, Fan?" cried Nellie.

Mrs. Halliday answered for them. "You must excuse the girls to-night. I appreciate their situation. I never could bear to rest even the cleanest of pans upon a trimmed and dainty gown. I dare say that instinct is common."

So Long Aprons did all the work. But they had a

merry time. They chatted, and hurried, and slopped the water some, and got the potatoes on, — there was not an “eye” left in one of them, — and they set their pans of parings on the table, and the dipper was laid there too ; and their knives, soiled and wet, were lying wherever it happened, and their chairs stood in the middle of the floor ; and Mrs. Halliday looked all about her, and the girls drew a long breath, and thought they were quite ready for something else, and that it was great fun to have Cooking Clubs.

Lolly took out the yeast recipe, and read it over slowly, and everybody listened and looked wise, until the child’s head was quite turned with having so much attention. She flirted up and down, and out and in, and bustled and ordered, until even the most systematic girl there lost her wits, and could do nothing only as Lolly Sumner told her. Even the tall, graceful First Gold-Stick went round laughingly after Lolly, and “tried” the potatoes as often as she was bid, and took off the hops when she was told : what else, indeed, was the business of a Gold-Stick in Waiting ?

Then Lolly started for the pantry. “All come at once, and get things in an orderly way, and have no running and confusion ! Let head save heels !”

So in the entire Club went after yeast-jar, long-

spoons, potato-jammer, ginger-can, salt-cup, sugar-box, bread-bowl, strainer, flour-pan, and sieve. Each one came forth bearing her allotted dish. Even Caddy had determined not to be left out any longer. She had scooped up the flour for the yeast. She brought out some on her hair, and on her nose, and on her sleeve, and on the front breadth of her dress, to testify that it really was she who had got the flour.

The merry procession proceeded directly toward the table; and then it was that the twinkle in Mrs. Haldiday's quiet eyes appeared also at the corners of her mouth.

For now the Cooking Club paused in a body. There was no place to set anything down.

“‘Clean up as you go, my dears,’ is one of the golden maxims of the kitchen.”

So they carried the things back. The president, attended by both her Gold-Sticks, led the retreat, and everybody had a red face. Then they disposed of the parings, and washed the pans, knives, and table, Caddy still following at the heels of the merry Long Aprons, handing the towels, catching the pans out of Nellie's hand, who was forgetting to dry them, placing the chairs, deploring certain dirty spots upon the floor, and making herself one of them as much as she could,

"I do wish I had an apron!" she whispered, at last, to Lolly.

"Why, do you, my dear?" said Mrs. Halliday. "I'll get you one of Marion's directly, and with pleasure."

Marion stepped into the bed-room after her mother. "I wondered you didn't offer them, mamma! But you meant to impress the lesson — didn't you?"

Mrs. Halliday smiled. "Daughter, there is something nice about that poor Caddy Golden; may I trust you to bring it out?"

But Fanny Ledyard — well, in girl parlance, she was "mad." She was not going to ask for an apron, not she! And when Mrs. Halliday, perceiving that she could not make her wish for one, pleasantly offered one of Marion's, Fanny declined.

But nobody minded. For the crisis had come. Both potatoes and hops were done. Lolly read her receipt once more.

"'Boil a handful of hops in a quart of water. Boil twelve good-sized pared potatoes in the least water practicable. Strain the hop water upon the potatoes. Add a tea-cup of sugar, a table-spoon of ginger, table-spoon of salt, mash all together. When just lukewarm, add a tea-cup of yeast, and set in a warm place to rise.'

"And that, ladies, makes the lightest, and sweetest, and nuttiest bread ever eaten in Tu-Whit Hollow!"

The president, at least, was having a good time. And each girl stopped and wrote it down, and felt that now she had some reliable knowledge of her own; which, indeed, she had.

And then they dipped, and measured, and jammed, and scattered, and strained, and set the kettles down upon the white floor; and the kitchen was so noisy before the yeast was finally in the jar, that both the cats left and went down cellar.

The girls all sniffed at the yeast very wisely; and Lolly said it certainly smelt "like mother's;" and Mrs. Halliday both sniffed and tasted, and was so good as to say she was sure it would rise and be very nice.

Then they proceeded to set bread. Three girls started for the flour bin, but Mrs. Halliday said two were plenty, and told Jane Graves to wait and go afterwards with wing and dust-pan.

After such a broad hint, Lolly and Nellie had their thoughts about them. Lolly endeavored to handle the scoop so there should be no traces of flour upon her sleeve. But, alas! the serious face, bending so low over the flour for each scoopful, was too much for Nellie Crane. Her great eyes gleamed above her rosy cheeks suddenly. The next time Lolly bent, a

cloud of flour was puffed into her face, — nose, eyes, mouth, and hair, — and the scoop fell into the pan, and powdered her afresh. She sneezed, coughed, stared at Nellie, and coughed again.

Then, like a flash, — beware, now, Nellie Crane, — she tipped the pan, puffed her own cheeks, and, before Nellie could think, she, too, was sneezing and coughing, and white as a miller from head to foot ; and, dear me ! had dropped the pan, and down it had gone, part on the floor, all over their shoes, and part all over the flour-chest. What a sight it was ! and in Mrs. Halliday's house, too !

“ Why, Nellie Crane ! ”

“ Why, Lolly Sumner ! and see how you like it. ”

They were both almost angry with each other for a moment, and then they just shook with laughter, and shut the door quick as a wink.

After about two minutes, Mrs. Halliday opened it. The corners of her mouth drew slightly as she surveyed them.

“ Come, my dears, I fear we shall be late with the bread, since there are also brown loaves and pocket-books yet to set. ”

She held the door open, and the president and her playfellow walked out. There was a great shout, and immediately afterward much suppressed giggling ; but

the two went directly through into the back room, where they were presently joined by the two Gold-Sticks in waiting, who bore whisk brooms.

It was late—half past eight. Mrs. Halliday was obliged to establish herself president *pro tem*. She sent careful Jane Graves into the pantry, with wing and dust-pan, set Mary Graham to jam the flour and potatoes for the bread, and then approached Fanny Ledyard.

“Would you be so good as to set the pocket-books? If you will be so kind, and would like it, I had thought of inviting yourself and Janie to breakfast with us to-morrow morning. Hot pocket-books are very nice for breakfast, I assure you.”

Invited to breakfast at Mrs. Halliday's! Fanny could not resist that. She took the proffered apron in one hand, and the pocket-book recipe in the other.

And this was the way Fanny made the pocket-books:—

She warmed one quart of new milk. She added two eggs, three tea-spoons of sugar, one cup of yeast, and four table-spoons of melted butter. Then she stirred enough flour in to make it a moderately stiff sponge.

Nota Bene. She beat the eggs quite as long and

sharply as if she were intending to make white cake, or a dewy, creamy custard.

She didn't stir them round and round into a quivering mass — that is the way some folks beat eggs. With them the original slipperiness and toughness of the egg remains. Their custards are porous, and altogether unsatisfactory. Their cake, too, is full of all sizes of pores, and is tough.

"Dear me!" said Fan, listening to this and much more from Mrs. Halliday. "To think there is anything in the way you beat eggs, or what you beat them in!"

Nellie, the president, and the Gold-Sticks, with their whisk-brooms, had now reappeared, all somewhat floury.

"Order out the receipt-books," Fan cried to Lolly. "There's ever so many golden maxims: 'Never take tin to beat eggs in' — there's something awful chemical in eggs; and, besides, the eggs'll be heavy. And you must beat until it don't seem as if you could beat another minute; and even then you mustn't stop unless the eggs'll run thin as water; and you must beat right *through* 'em — just so!"

The girls didn't write this down, but they stood about and thought of it, while Fanny doubled a snowy bread towel, and laid it over her sponge. Then she

set it in a corner by the stove, and left it for warmth, and time, and the yeast, to work their own sweet will with it.

The next thing, Lolly looked into the bread-pan, and took up the potato-jammer. For Mrs. Halliday herself had failed to get the bread set—Fanny had needed so much instruction about beating those two eggs. Everything was almost cold; the potatoes only half incorporated with the flour. Lolly made quick work of them. Then she added warm water until Mrs. Halliday told her to stop. Then she stirred in flour until it was just thick enough to miss being liquid.

While Lolly was beating up her sponge, Mrs. Halliday talked to the girls on this wise: "Some bread-makers scald all the flour used for the sponge. I use the potatoes directly from the fire, and then scald a couple of cups of flour, of course; but that is all. When I have scalded the whole, my bread, though exceedingly light,—if large pores constitute lightness,—is tough. My theory is, that the flakes of flour, after being suddenly cooked into paste, cannot swell completely. My ideal of a nice yeast-raised loaf is, that in fine, even pores it shall resemble bread raised by 'salt-risings.' " She smiled at Janie Graves as she said this.

"Please see if I don't understand it," said Nellie Crane. "You wish every flake of flour to pop out to its biggest and snowiest, like nice pop-corn; and it can't if you scald it."

Mrs. Halliday assented. "Only, Nellie, so long as so many good cooks scald their flour, we won't say that it *can't*. I simply know it *don't* with me."

The girls were trying the warmth of the pan of sponge, to see whether it was cool enough to add the yeast. Some eight pairs of little hands were clasping the pan at the same time. Such wise young faces!

"For you go and scald your yeast, and you're done for!" exclaimed the Second Gold-Stick. "I've heard cook tell the girls so, many a time."

The girls "nudged" each other, as much as to say, "Cook! girls! my! don't we feel big!"

But the First Gold-Stick "nudged" nobody. She smiled over at her young fellow-officer. "Yes, indeed, Caddy. The potatoes, and the flour, and the water might be mixed as cunning as could be, and then, should the yeast be scalded the least mite, the sponge *never* would rise."

And such a look of kindness and encouragement beamed from the sweet blue eyes on Caddy, it seemed really to set Caddy apart; and the girls let her alone. Some thought the sponge was cool enough. Some

thought it wasn't. The president bent over it so closely she almost touched her nose to it. A little hand went up like a flash, — it was Nellie's, — and if Mrs. Halliday hadn't shaken her head just as she did, Lolly's whole face would have been dipped into the sponge, I'm very sure.

"Well, my dears," said Mrs. Halliday, at last, "I always try it with my finger."

"So does my mother!"

"And mine!" "And mine!" "And mine!"

"And it's all right, of course," said Lolly. "Anybody has nice, fresh hands when they make bread."

She put a pretty white finger in. She said they would have to wait about five minutes.

They waited about five minutes. Then Nellie poured in the cup of yeast. Lolly beat it in. The First Gold-Stick clapped a white cloth over it. Fanny ran with it to place it beside the pocket-books, and the bread was finally set.

They next looked at the clock. Then they all, with the air of little women that meant business, surrounded the brown-bread pan.

But, at a wink from her mother, Marion stepped into the place of honor. The wink meant, "Hurry, now! it's long past bed-time. These girls ought to be at home."

Mrs. Halliday brought out the molasses jug. Marion measured out a quart of the brown flour.

"Pour me a cup of molasses, Caddy ; Nellie, a cup of yeast. A quart of lukewarm water, your highness !"

After much pouring in and pouring out, and much dipping in of the housewifely forefinger, the water was at last obtained "lukewarm." The molasses was poured upon the flour ; the water rinsed the cup, and was, likewise, poured in ; the yeast was added, and the whole briskly beaten, not stirred.

"Just as much water as flour—that is the nice rule for a brown-bread sponge," said Marion. "Plenty of chance to swell, is what brown flour wants. There is a deal of swell to the bran. If you don't, your bread will be dry."

"Do you like brown bread, Marion ?" asked Caddy, earnestly.

"Like brown bread ?" she answered, folding a snowy towel over the pan, and placing it by the other sponges. "Why, Caddy, didn't you know that intellectual people *always* liked brown bread ? The papers said so only yesterday. *My* mental superiority, I will confide to you, young ladies, is chiefly due to the absence of the white loaf from the breakfast table. Mother insists that her daughter shall have quite her

share of the phosphorus raised on the farm. The phosphorus of a farmer's wheat-field is usually fed out to a favorite winter cow, and to various other creatures that have no lessons to learn and no thoughts to think. On this establishment they have to share the brain-food with us. And I do assure you that phosphorus done into a brown loaf is very sweet and toothsome. If I am not so brilliant as usual to-night, please to bear in mind that we've been out of brown bread for nearly two days."

She was standing in the middle of the room. Her delicate face was arch with smiles. She made a funny bow to close with, so deep and so jerky her curls all tumbled over her head. Everybody laughed except Caddy.

Nellie nudged her. "Can't you take a joke?"

"Was it a joke?" asked Caddy, seriously. "I supposed there was something in it. There most always is something in what Marion says. I was thinking about it, for I always thought brown bread was cheap and poor-folks-ish."

Marion heard it, and laughed. She ran out the back door. "Rob-bert!" she called. The barn door swung open. "All ready to hitch on!"

The girls were sitting round the stove when she came in. Her mother was leaning back in her rock-

ing chair, looking thoroughly tired out. Marion went to Lolly's side and whispered to her.

Lolly flushed up. She looked, for a moment, really put out. Marion's arm stole round her. A bright pink touched the white cheek. "Now, Lolly, you know I didn't mean anything! But, see, it's after ten o'clock. Our mothers'll never let us go on, if we stay out so late. Don't the dear little president see?"

The dear little president gave herself up to the caressing arm. "Now motion to have the things brought," the Chief Suggester then suggested.

Lolly smiled. "I motion the Second Gold-Stick wait upon the Cooking Club with its things."

"Second the motion," cried the First Gold-Stick.

Then off *all* the girls started for the things. Mrs. Halliday smiled. Lolly cried, "How absurd!" and went into the bedroom too. As Marion was muffling her in her cloud she whispered her again, —

"O, dear, yes! I'm no more fit to be president than the man in the moon." She drew her cloud away from her mouth, and appointed them to come again, in the morning, to bake the bread.

At that moment they heard a wagon. Marion went to the door, and the girls saw it was Mrs. Halliday's hired man, and that they were to be taken home in the big lumber wagon.

"O! O!" cried Lolly; "this is the best of it all — to go home in a load. Don't you wish you were going too, Marion?"

Marion turned, and looked toward her mother a little wishfully. The girls gathered round. "Do, do! please do! please say yes."

"I guess not, — not to-night, girls. Marion takes cold too easily."

Marion's smile was just as bright. "No, Lolly, it *wouldn't* be best. Mother has just had such a time curing up my throat."

Over the wagon wheels they clambered, all spry as squirrels, except Caddy. At a motion from Marion Robert lifted her in. The little heiress had never rode in a lumber wagon in her life, and knew nothing of the fun of stepping on the hub of the wheel, and up, up, and over in.

Robert mounted the high spring seat. Off they drove in the glittering moonlight, over the frozen road, and the more they jolted the jollier they were.

"Daughter, would you have gone?" Mrs. Halliday asked, as they closed the door.

"O, I knew you wouldn't let me go, mother. But I'm only a little girl, myself, and I do enjoy their good times. If I get carried away, I'm always sure

of my mother's 'yes' and 'no' coming after me, to bring me back."

Her mother's arms were round her. Her arms were round her mother. Her own face wore a pretty, caressing smile ; but the mother's face was strangely pensive.

"I have to deny you some pleasures, my own girl, simply because of this sensitive little throat ; because of these delicate lungs."

"Your own sensible girl knows that, mother dear. And if I cannot go, it is always left to stay at home with you — with *you*, mother."

"I was going to lecture you, my dear ; but you beg the question so, there is no chance." Mrs. Halliday kissed her and let her go.

No shadows of this world ever had come between them — pretty daughter, tender mother !





CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE BREAD GETS ALMOST BAKED.

IT was a chill, dismal morning, raw with coming rain. But before sunrise Fanny Ledyard was at Mrs. Graves for Janie. A very nice, amiable girl Fanny was this morning. She had never "gone anywhere" with quiet, humble Janie before. But a member of "our Club" was a somewhat different personage; and the two were as merry together as could be on the way to Mrs. Halliday's breakfast.

They found Mrs. Halliday up, a good fire, and the pocket-books and bread both ready to be hardened. The brown bread was not quite so forward. As for the yeast, it was a perfect puff, heaving and fragrant.

Mrs. Halliday had the flour on the table, and was just pushing back her wristbands. "Please let it be us who do it!" Fanny politely insisted, hurrying off her things. This morning she was in a print dress

and long-sleeved apron. The white crimp at her throat was the only vestige about her of ruffle. "I can harden the bread, and Janie can take the pocket-books."

Mrs. Halliday hesitated. Early breakfasts was a point with her. All her plans were like clockwork. The Cooking Club had put her out as she never dreamed it could.

"Well," she said, "I suppose you ought, since you are here to learn something. But it takes stout wrists, girls. I knead my bread more than most people, and I do most of it when I harden it. It makes a finer loaf."

With the long, strong spoon Fanny first stirred in all the flour she could. Then she tucked back her sleeves, and drew a long breath. Then she doubled up her small, thin, brown hands into a pair of little brown fists, and pounded away in the middle of the pan for full five minutes. Mrs. Halliday watched her a little, and went away. With Miss Fanny the time for advice was not yet.

But the moment her back was turned, Janie, who had hardened the pocket-books, which needed no kneading, and had set them down to rise again, whispered her, —

"Fanny, *that* is not the way. You must begin at the

edges and work in flour until it will cleave off and turn over upon the middle. You can't knead it until it is stiff enough to take up, and be turned out of the pan."

"O, dear! Well, I'd like to know how I'm to get my hands loose, so as to put the flour in."

Sure enough, Fan's hands were stuck fast. The lesser housewife laughed at her plight, as she saw her lift her hands, pulling a long rope of dough up with them. She lifted and lifted. She drew the pan clear from the table, but still the dough didn't break. Fanny laughed, too, and danced the pan up and down. The dough held to her hands, and she was just going to skip across the floor, with the pan suspended thus, when a little exclamation of warning caused them both to turn. Marion and her mother stood by the sitting-room door.

Blushing up to her eyes, Fanny let the pan down in a hurry. Janie dashed in a scoop of flour, and by its aid the little brown paws were at last released. Then Mrs. Halliday came to her aid; and between the large, handy hands and the small, awkward ones, the dough was speedily put in working shape. Then Fanny pounded, and dinted, and clasped, and squeezed for full five minutes. At that time her shoulders ached soundly. "Don't you think it would be fine-grained now?" she asked.

"Not very. It needs a three-girl power for at least ten minutes longer. I think I'd better finish it."

Fanny was glad to resign. She looked over at Marion, who sat idly in her mother's rocking-chair. She had a strip of red flannel round her neck, and, in wrapper and slippers, looked almost like a sick girl — so fragile.

"Why, Maymy!" she exclaimed; "I never noticed before that you were so slim! Such a little throat! such a little wrist! such a little waist! My! if you don't look out you'll blow away some day, when the wind is high!"

A pained look swept over Mrs. Halliday's face. But Marion laughed. "You arn't used to seeing me before breakfast; that's all. After I curl my hair, and have my coffee, and get dressed, I shall be all right."

Janie had to ask twice whether she might go after the breakfast potatoes. Both the girls went. Mrs. Halliday set the bread in its place, and remained looking blankly at the window. At last her eyes brimmed with tears.

Marion went to her at once. "O, mother, I'm not so sick as all that." Her voice trembled, her cheek was paler than usual, but the sweetest of smiles curved her lips. Mrs. Halliday suddenly drew her to her

side ; but she did not look at her, nor speak to her. As she heard the girls returning, she left the room.

When she came back, Marion was tripping about, the two girls at her heels. The coffee was bubbling, and Janie was about to be taught wonderful things in the way of cooking smoked ham. An unusual, dainty, changeable pink was visible on the graceful teacher's cheeks.

"Why, mother," she said, "the girls never have heard of frying ham as we do. Dear me, Fanny, these pocket-books will have to be attended to first, after all !"

So the molding-board was brought out. A bit of soda, the size of a little white bean, was dissolved in a spoonful of warm milk, and worked into the dough. Then it was rolled into a sheet half an inch thick. Then it was spread with butter. Then it was cut into squares. Then the squares were folded over, pocket-book shape, stamped with an embossed pocket-book design, placed on a tin, and set to rise once more. They began to puff in five minutes.

"O, how cunning !" the girls cried.

"*Arn't* they cunning?" echoed Marion. She always asked her mother, "*Arn't* they cunning?" every time they made pocket-books.

In less than no time they were fit for the oven.

Then the potatoes were placed in a steamer, over a kettle full of water, which boiled uproariously, and sent up a dense column of steam.

"If you don't have it boiling just so, or let it stop boiling at all, you won't have potatoes like ours—flaking all over and opening snowily. I want the grain of my potatoes to sparkle when I break them on my plate. I could not eat a soggy one. Therefore there must be lots of water; it must boil like everything every minute; they must be taken off the moment they are just done, and put on the table the next. We time all the other parts of the meal to suit the potatoes."

Fanny secretly thought, "How fussy!" But she was too wise to say that at their house "potatoes" was the part of the meal that cooked itself.

Meantime Mrs. Halliday had cut the ham. The slices were placed in boiling water, and boiled until they were thoroughly cooked. Then they were put in a frying-pan and browned nicely. After that, Marion fried some eggs to "look like pictures." She didn't "turn" them, but carefully dripped gravy over them, until they were done. These eggs she laid upon the slices of ham, the golden centers shining through the pearly settings; and the ham was so pink where it was not brown, and so brown where it was not pink

— truly, Marion's platter was like a bit of painting, and the pretty cook of fourteen was as proud of it as she could be.

Fanny had just attended to the brown bread, which she did by stirring in brown flour until the spoon would almost stand in it, and then dipping it into the tins, when she was called to breakfast.

It was a true farm-house breakfast. The bill of fare was simple, but the dishes themselves would have tempted you. The potatoes were such flaky, floury balls, the ham and eggs so inviting, the coffee fragrant and amber deep and clear, the butter molded into a dainty yellow rose, the cream genuine, the apple butter nice as jelly, the horseradish relish would have done credit to the whole French nation, while the pocket-books were a glory to the entire race of little girls. Would you had all been there at breakfast!

The dark morning added its own charm to the cosiness of the fire and the deliciousness of the breakfast-table; the little tongues ran at full speed; and Marion presided, instead of her mother. It was the best part of the Cooking Club, so far, when, all at once, everybody looked at the east window. · Splash! splash! great rain-drops were breaking against the panes.

“Going to be a rainy day!” said Robert.

"O, dear!" said Janie.

"O, dear!" said Fanny.

"O, dear! how unfortunate!" said Marion.

"Perhaps it will rain a little, and then clear up!" said Mrs. Halliday.

But it didn't. Instead, it "set in" and rained steadily. The sky came down lower and lower; heavy and leaden, it hung like a curtain. It rained slow, then it rained fast; it rained in slanting lines, and it rained in fine, all-penetrating mist; but, after some fashion, it promised to rain all day.

At nine o'clock the Graham loaves were ready to bake, and the white dough to mold into loaves, and the Cooking Club hadn't got there, only what came before breakfast. That fortunate section flattened its noses against the windows every five minutes.

"I know their mothers won't let them," said Janie.

"Well, never mind," said Marion. "One Gold-Stick and two members constitute a quorum."

"What's a quorum?" asked Janie.

"O, a force sufficient to bake two loaves of brown bread and four of white."

The Fanny part of the quorum declared the brown loaves would never be bread—they were so soft. "Why, it will run now, if you tip it, Marion."

"So it ought, because the heat will swell the flour

still more ; and if there wasn't plenty of moisture, it would be dry as a husk."

Then the housewives put each a hand in the oven, and sought to impress upon her memory how hot it ought to be. "Just hot enough to scorch you well, but not burn you," Fanny concluded.

"Now, remember," Mrs. Halliday said, after the loaves were well in, "that brown bread must not get *too* light before it is put in. Also that there must be fire enough to begin with to complete the baking. A fresh blaze will burn the crust, while a steady fire will sweeten it. A fitful, fierce heat turns flour into charcoal ; a steady, clear heat turns it into sugar."

Then Marion cut the dough into quarters. She got the girlish little paws skillfully into the stickiness, and skillfully out of it. She taught them how to dextrously turn in this side and then that, — this end and then that, — and all the while to be kneading.

"Mine begins to feel *so* nice and springy!" cried Fanny, gleefully, at last.

"Mine did as much as five minutes ago," said Janie, still squeezing away womanfully at her puffy, elastic roll.

Marion was larding the tins. "Well, get them into neat, oblong—"

A loud knock interrupted her. As she opened the

door, the beating, sleety rain drove full in her face, and half blinded her ; but she saw who it was. "Why, girls ! girls !"

It was the President and Nellie. And in such a plight ! Their umbrella was turned completely inside out—a deplorable wreck of cambric and whalebone. Their hats were awry, their faces wet and red, their hair in strings, their dresses dripping. They were laughing ; but it was plain to Marion that the little president had had a serious crying-spell sometime during the morning.

"Why, girls, what *were* your mothers thinking of ?" Mrs. Halliday asked in astonishment.

"They thought anything to get rid of us, I guess," laughed saucy Nellie, shaking herself like a wet Newfoundland.

"I felt that I, at least, *must* come," said Lolly, choking with a long sigh, and looking ruefully at her mother's umbrella. "I told mother that responsibility was responsibility, and that our Club was as much a Club as anybody's Club. Nellie came, and there was a little lull, and so mother—"

Lolly stopped. She did not care to say that her mother had let her come. She had come in spite of her mother. Her mother had done everything to prevent her, save to command her not to come.

Mrs. Halliday understood. She tried to dry the children ; but both refused to put on shoes and stockings belonging to Marion, although the water squeaked in their shoes at every step. The bottom, at least, of the Diamond Bowl always was full of water, after even a rain of two hours.

Janie and Fanny, each at an oven door, watched the Graham bread bake, while the president and Nellie molded the two remaining white loaves. At last all the white loaves were set to rise — a consummation which, some time back, Mrs. Halliday had never expected to live to see. She instructed them that hop yeast bread was better for rising slowly, placed back from the fire ; and when the time came, she showed them how bread looked when it was "light enough."

The loaves were about half baked, when Fanny gave a dismayed little shriek. "O, pa's come ! I've got to go. I know I have !"

She ran out on the piazza. Tears stood in her eyes. "O, pa, the Cooking Club isn't half out — we've only just got the bread in !"

"Can't help that. — How do, Mrs. Halliday ? — Pretty weather for children to be a mile from home ! You get on your things quick as scat, now — you and Jane Graves, both. I promised Mrs. Graves I'd bring her."

Mrs. Halliday went in. She looked at Lolly and Nellie. "My dears, I think you had better go too. He has the double buggy, and it is right on his way. I am sorry, but it is evidently going to rain all day, and I fear you will take cold, in your wet clothes. I shall feel much better about you, chickens, when I know you are under your own mothers' wings."

Lolly and Nellie glanced at each other. Nellie compressed her lips, as who should say, "*Isn't she polite?*"

"But the bread, Mrs. Halliday," said Lolly at last. "And I think we ought to clean up."

"That will be all right, my dear."

So the President silently got on her things. The First Gold-Stick felt much troubled. She followed the girls into the bedroom. To her, too, it didn't seem "polite," although she knew it was quite the best thing to be done.

"If you hadn't been so wet," she whispered to Lolly. "But mother believes when children get wet they're almost as sure to die as chickens. I'll tell you something, Lolly. Don't you remember that thawy Saturday, winter before last, when we played Esquimaux all day in that snow house we made, and I got my skirts all damped through? Well, Lolly dear, I never have got over that cough. I know mother thinks—never mind, though. But, you see, mothers have to be

firm and decided. It was for your and Nellie's good. Appoint us another meeting, Lolly, and go home cheerfully."

Lolly went back into the kitchen, and tried to smile. She opened the oven. "They haven't run over at all. They are baking nicely. One side is a lovely golden tint already. Mayn't we turn them before we go, please?"

As Mr. Ledyard had driven under the shed where Robert was at work, they were permitted. Janie came near letting her loaf fall, and Fanny broke in the end of hers, and Lolly got a burned finger. It was under the smart of this burn, I dare say, that she said, "Bread is a poor thing for us to begin with, *I* think. Late at night, early in the morning, and half the forenoon, bread has to be attended to; of course it couldn't be managed *nicely* at all. I think our mothers ought to have offered to teach us *that* at home, and let us have tried afternoon cookery, pies and cake, and such quick things —"

"Appoint quick, Lolly," whispered Marion. "Mr. Ledyard's coming."

"The next meeting will be at my own house," Lolly continued. "We shall bake cake, — several kinds, — and then we'll see!"

"Yes, and we'll stay and eat our cooking there, I'll

bet," muttered Nellie, as they went out. "This is the very meanest Cooking Club I ever saw. Mrs. Halliday is a regular Puritan; that's what she is! Only think — to *send* us home!"

I don't suppose Nellie knew quite what she meant by "Puritan." But the girls, none of them, felt very comfortable going out into the pelting rain, each wrapped in a heavy, grown-up woolen shawl of Mrs. Halliday's. Such a forlorn-looking load as it was! — let us excuse them.





CHAPTER VI.

ROGUE NELLIE.

THE very last night before the Cooking Club at Mrs. Sumner's had come, and Lolly was no better. Should *this* "soaking her feet" not help her, truly she would be in a nice condition to act as president. It was to have been such a great day! She had intended to show the girls such royal hospitalities — she could count upon *her* mother; and she just longed for the chance to contrast her hearty sympathy, her gracious forbearances, with Mrs. Halliday's up-and-down ways. "*I* believe in being a lady toward little girls, as well as to a person's own friends!" Lolly had said to Nellie Crane, indignantly.

She sat with her feet in the bath-tub, and mournfully considered how impracticable it was, in this world, to do quite exactly as you have a mind to; in *her* little life it had, in very few instances, turned out

well. "I believe it is foreordained," she mused, "that things are to turn out good only when you do as your mothers say." Truly, it was "hard lines."

Lolly was in hot water, literally and figuratively. She could scarcely hold feet or feelings still. But she herself had asked that to-night the water in the tub might be a great deal hotter, and she would try to "cover up and sweat," though she detested "sweats;" and she knew that a bowl of hot composition-tea was waiting out on the kitchen stove to complete her miseries.

At last she leaned over against her mother. She put her hand near her mother's, and mother took it in both her own.

But they remained silent. They had been remarkably silent these last days, ever since Lolly had been sick, in fact; and Lolly had been taken sick on the day of the bread-baking at Mrs. Halliday's. And the gentle, pensive silence of the chatty, companionable, pretty mother — O, how Lolly had felt it!

And she had been so sick, was so sick now! She couldn't breathe through her nose at all; her head ached, all her bones ached; her flesh was burning; and, worst of all, she was tormented all over with such a miserable restlessness: if ever she had needed a nice mother, when was it, if not this last week! As

she sat back in the shadowy hood of her mother's soft scarlet shawl, seeming to herself just one feverish, throbbing pulse from head to foot, she stole a longing look out at her mother's face. It was, at that moment, delicately pink with the rosy reflections from the fire; it seemed so sweet and fair, and so pensive! Mrs. Sumner herself had no idea how young, and pretty, and girlish she looked to her little daughter.

Little by little Lolly felt her resentment fading away, her wilful thoughts softening. She longed to creep back by some way into her mother's love. What a pity that, for so proud a girl, the nearest way should lie through the Valley of Humility!

"Mother, how cool and good your hands feel to mine!" she said at last, trying to speak naturally; but after a constraint of a whole week one cannot speak naturally all at once; especially a little person with no deceit in her, like Lolly.

Both the "cool, good hands" pressed the small, hot, dry ones.

The lamp was not yet lighted. It was deep rosy twilight back in the scarlet shawl, and resting in it, hidden away with her tears, Lolly determined she would just give a little jump and get back—a little, decisive jump, and land in her mother's heart.

"Mother, have you forgiven me?"

"I don't know, Lolly, as we are called upon to forgive until the person is sorry."

"The person *is* sorry," the low voice immediately said.

"Such a spunky little person—a whole week—how could you, my own girlie?"

Lolly felt her mother's arm linger as she drew the shawl more closely about her; she caught the tender arm, staid in it, in its warm shelter; she drew it close around herself—and then she broke down, and gave up for good and all.

"I know it, mother, but I am just as sorry now as I was spunky before. I ought not to have gone that day." But here the tears poured down over her cheeks and stopped her.

Her mother leaned over, and drew the hot, wet little head upon her breast. "There, there!" she said, with the coo of a mother-bird.

"O, mother,"—only Lolly said "buther," for she could speak through her nose now less easily than before,— "O, buther, I ab a bad girl!"

"Have been a bad girl—yes, Lolly, But this, surely, is a good girl."

And then, just there, was a knock at the door, and Lolly had to raise her throbbing head. Still the dark-

brown braids were first kissed ; and the penitent girl was left feeling how blessed it is to confess and be forgiven.

“O, dear ! Who cad hab cub here do-dight ?” she said.

It was not, indeed, the usual hour to see people in the Diamond Bowl. Farmer-folks are busy with their chores at that hour—the men at the barn, and their wives and daughters skimming pans, “warming the calves’ milk,” and getting things ready for the morrow’s breakfast.

Lolly drew back into her scarlet tent, and Mrs. Sumner, throwing a rug over the gleaming white footies, bath-tub and all, went to the door.

It was Lolly’s comrade in transgression, Nellie Crane—the last little person Mrs. Sumner cared to see.

Evidently the wetting hadn’t made *her* sick ; instead, it had “made her grow,” as the children say. Her black eyes were dancing with her half-mile scamper, her red cheeks were red as red apples, and her white teeth flashed between her red lips as if the white meat of the red apple had just been bitten into—for all the world like that.

“Good evening, Miss Nellie.”

Miss Nellie responded demurely, and came in.

Lolly knew Nellie's voice, you may be sure ; but she kept back in her shawl. In her hour of penitence she didn't feel glad of her visitor. But Nellie sat down all the same ; and as Lolly didn't speak, Mrs. Sumner politely asked the only half-welcome guest whether she would "take off her things."

Nellie at once unbuttoned her sacque. "I don't care if I do. Mother said I might come over, and stay all night with Lolly."

Mrs. Sumner's forehead reddened. Nellie had been there to "stay all night" before. But she could not bring herself to send her back, although the Diamond Bowl mothers had long ago amicably agreed to send each other's children home whenever they became troublesome, or were inconvenient. Mrs. Sumner had secretly observed that it was a somewhat dangerous experiment, and so never, herself, had tried it. She took Nellie's things, and carried them into the hall.

While she was gone Nellie smoothed her hair, and pruned her plumage variously, and altogether had the air of a state visitor by the time Mrs. Sumner returned.

"I heard Laura was sick?" she said, inquiringly, to her grown-up hostess.

"Yes, Lolly has been very ill ever since her walk

in the rain, and is so still. Lolly, my dear, Nellie has come to see you."

Thus appealed to, Lolly was obliged to make some sign. She emerged from the shawl, and looked over at Nellie, and the two smiled, faintly, at each other.

Nellie continued to address her conversation, however, to Mrs. Sumner. "I thought I ought to come over and see what the calculations were for to-morrow, Lolly being sick."

"Yes, Miss Nellie."

"I am afraid, and mother thought so too, that as Lolly was sick, there might not be one." And then she held her breath, and Lolly caught hers, to see what the intentions were; for all along Lolly had been truly ashamed to mention another Cooking Club to her mother.

Truth to tell, her intentions in this matter had been uncertain with Mrs. Sumner herself. But now, as she saw the children's eyes fixed upon her so beseechingly, and so timidly, she felt indulgent toward the little women. "Well, I suppose that, Lolly being sick, she needs amusement all the more. If she is no worse, it may go on."

"I hear our bread turned out just beautiful!" Nellie ventured to her silent friend in the shawl.

"Yes, id did. Barion brought be sub slices for toast."

"I can make it alone, now," continued Nellie. "I made ours this week, all but part of the kneading, and pa said it was as nice as mother's."

"Did you? Well, I'll be glad that Club was sub benefid to subbody," sighed Lolly, listlessly.

"O, come now, grandmother; you arn't so good and venerable as all that, I know!" Mrs. Sumner had gone out, and Nellie had changed both her seat and her tone, and was over by Lolly. She pulled the shawl aside, peered in, and grimaced. "No, I don't see 'em yet, but I'll bet you've got 'em; and you better let 'em come, Lolly, for if they should 'strike in,' it'll kill you!"

Lolly pulled away from the black eyes. "See 'eb! strike id! who? what? What do you bean, Delie Crade?"

"Why, spectacles, and a back comb, and a knitting sheath, and snuff-box, and all the other things that belong with good old ladies. If they should strike in, Lolly, it'll go hard with you! Likelier'n not you'll never get over it! Grandmotherishness goes hard with young folks, I've 'allers hear'n tell.'"

Lolly's red face flashed redder. "Delie," she said, "you don't help to bake a good girl of be ad all. It

isn't dice do dell you so, but if id hadn't been for you, I should have binded buther, ad not gone id the raid."

Nellie's cheeks puffed right out. "O, we shouldn't, should we? Poor, misled lamb, so she was! We wasn't a-pouting, and a-hating our mother, and a-standing by the window in the sulks when that dreadful wolf of a Nellie Crane came along—was we? We hadn't our hat on before she came: O, no! not at all! LOLLY SUMNER!"—and all at once Nellie's voice thundered—"LOLLY SUMNER, you're a—you're a—you're POLITE—arn't you?"

But by this time Lolly was crying. "Answer me!" Nellie adjured her, in a low, intense tone, afraid lest Mrs. Sumner should hear. It is, indeed, always inconvenient to quarrel in a room where you are afraid some one will hear. "*Arn't* you polite, I say, when I have come to visit you? I am not welcome! I know it. I saw it in your mother's face. What is *she* more than *my* mother!"

Lolly's angry feet splashed the water. "If she wasn't bore thad your buther, you wouldn't ask. Delie Crade, you're as bean as dirt! I cad tell you, *by* buther is better thad other buthers, because she cares whed I do wrong, and because she is sorry to see be id bad cubany."

"Well, miss, I suppose you are sick; but I guess

my mother'd be sorry if she saw the company her girl was in at present. I'll do both mothers a favor by leaving. If yours 'll be so good as to come and give me my things, I'll never darken *her* doors again — no, I *never* will, Lolly Sumner, just as sure as I hope to live and breathe ! ”

But, unfortunately, instead of the appropriate flashes, two big tears came to the front, and stood in full view in Nellie's great black eyes.

Lolly tried to speak ; but her nose refused to let her. Her head dropped back against the chair. Her little mouth opened with a groan, and she drew a succession of long, dreadful breaths. Nellie ran to her at once. “ Lolly ! What is it, Lolly ? ”

Tears came afresh at this. But these tears only made her breathing worse. “ I cad breathe through by dose at all,” she gasped. “ Call buther, Delie.”

Nellie ran to the door. Mrs. Sumner dropped her skimmer and came. “ I cad breathe eddy logger,” Lolly gasped again.

Mrs. Sumner caught up a little bottle of golden oil—goose oil, my dears, but perfumed with rose until Lolly thought she could bear it ; and with a gentle forefinger rubbed the poor nose, and the pretty white space between the eyes, and the temples, and the throat, while Nellie stood by in fright.

At last Lolly could breathe again. "By feet are gold. Let Delie rub eb dry, dow, and I will go to bed." She hadn't looked at Nellie, but her tones had "thousands" of forgiveness in them. Nellie sprang for the towels and flesh-brush at once. She rubbed and chafed until the wilful white footies that had strayed with their mistress into all this dreadful trouble were as pink as sea-shells, and warm as toast; but she never looked up at Lolly, though, not even when Mrs. Sumner went out.

But Lolly took the chance. "Delie," she said, "I would kiss you, but I ab all oil. I ab ashaded of dalking to you so."

"It was me," said Nellie, hotly. "It is always me; my sparky temper! I liked you fit to cry all the time. The mothers are all right. It is their girls—hang their girls, I say! Dode you thig so?"

Both girls laughed through sparkling tears. "Do I soud like that?" laughed Lolly. "By ears rig so I cad hear what I do say."

But here Mrs. Sumner returned. In five minutes more Lolly was in her night-dress, and in her bed, red flannel around her neck, yellow mustard plasters bound upon her feet, a cupful of "composition" down her smarting throat; but she stopped over that, half way, and turned to Nellie with some of

the old fun in her eyes. "Thoroughword, ad spear-mid, ad cadnib, ad sage, ad sbartweed, ad gigger, ad bepper—all have I daken, and yed lib for other exprieds."

Her laughter brought a little moisture upon her skin, Nellie declared, as they tucked her in, head and ears. "There, miss, I bet you'll sweat! You'll be as chipper as a hoppergrass to-morrow—see if you arn't!"

Lolly smiled dozily. "Bebbe," she said. "Dow hurry, or I shall be asleeb before you cub."

They went out carefully, leaving the door just ajar. "I dare say you don't care to retire so early, Miss Nellie," Mrs. Sumner said. "Amuse yourself as you like with Lolly's things. Here's our little friend, Leonie Lescadie, sat up all last night in her church-suit for want of some one to put her to bed. I dare say she would be obliged to you for a little motherly attention. And here are Lolly's magazines, and some new Pansy-books. The piano I should prefer you not to open, as, if Lolly can sleep, I am anxious that she should. She was very restless all night last night."

"Then, please, Mrs. Sumner, don't you think I better go to bed right off, so as not to disturb her after she is asleep?"

"I am sorry, Miss Nellie, but I cannot have you

sleep with Lolly to-night. Neither of you could help talking, I am persuaded."

"O, dear Mrs. Sumner, I wouldn't."

"O, dear little Miss Crane, you would. I never knew you and Lolly to go to sleep before midnight."

"But to-night Lolly couldn't talk, you know," pleaded Nellie. "And I would keep her covered up so good, and should be there to ring the bell if she was worse, or anything. You know I think heaps of Lolly, Mrs. Sumner. And, besides, if you hear me speak once after I am fairly snuggled down, why, *then* you may come right in, and send me up stairs, or anywhere — truly, ruly, uly, now!"

That Nellie never said "truly, ruly, uly, now," unless she was dreadfully in earnest, Mrs. Sumner well knew. She had been sorry Nellie came, out of patience to think that Lolly would probably talk, and laugh, and fidget herself worse. She had not forgotten how the wilful girls had strengthened each other on that memorable rainy day; and she had fully meant, on many accounts, to put Miss Nellie by herself in the state bedroom.

But the pleadings of the warm little friend, her earnestness, and her charming ways carried the field. Mrs. Halliday would have held out. But Mrs. Sumner could not. Mrs. Halliday liked little girls theo-

retically, and according to principle. Mrs. Sumner liked them really and altogether—the good ones because they were good, and the bad ones because they so needed to be won toward goodness, and because their mothers must feel so dreadfully over them. She had, indeed, felt stern toward this one girl ever since that glimpse of her on that rainy morning, standing in the half-open door, and winking Lolly to come along. “But, after all,” she thought to herself, now, “really I ought to be two mothers in one when anybody’s little girl is here with mine; and I suppose it would be almost cruelty to send the child off alone so.”

So she told Miss Nellie if she could be as still as a mouse, she might. Nellie thought she could; and she proved it by scampering, like twenty mice, hither and thither to place her shoes by Lolly’s, and to deposit her apparel in various enticing places, and to set her chair back “orderly;” and, after all that, she must stop by Lolly’s book-shelf, and stand there in her night-dress, to read a little about Miss Eastman’s Canning children, although she had twice borrowed the book.

But at last she remembered about being “a mice.” She went scringing, and wincing, and tiptoeing toward the bed, lest there should be a noise. She stepped

up most carefully, to avoid Lolly's feet ; and I am ashamed to add that, at last, she suddenly went down among the pillows with a bounce that shook the bed, and made Lolly moan.

She glanced up at Mrs. Sumner, then giggled. "I may laugh, I suppose, now that Lolly is waked. Mrs. Sumner, I forgot, for *just* a minute, that she was sick, and I never could see pillows, all so white, and billowy, and puffy, without longing to come down upon them with a pounce."

She looked so guilty, and yet so pretty, sitting there behind Lolly, her riotous black hair curling down upon her white night-dress, that Mrs. Sumner was moved to give her a kiss, too, as she tucked up her own poor little girl for the last time.

And Nellie, who always did take the ell if the inch was given, was thereby emboldened to make the further import of her visit known. "Mother said, Mrs. Sumner, that if you approved, I might stay to-morrow, and help get ready for the Club ; and, Mrs. Sumner, I do want to, so bad ! It is so nice to be a visitor, and enjoy all that is pleasant and new in somebody else's house : anybody does get so poky living among the same things every day ; and you know there isn't another bay window in Tu-Whit Hollow, only up to Cad Golden's ; and much I'd be welcome to go

there, and spend a day! Say, please, that I shall stay."

Mrs. Sumner, who was but a nice big girl herself, after all,—only her manners were finer than a girl's,—was duly moved by all these piteous considerations: still she was much afraid she shouldn't care to see children by the time the Cooking Club came, should Nellie Crane, with her mischiefs, stay until then. So she simply said, "I'll see," placed the bell over at the back side, where Nellie was, and shut them in.

But she slept so soundly all night herself, she didn't know whether they talked or not, or whether Lolly was sick. She hurried in, as she dressed, with the dawn, to see. She found Nellie up, all robed, buttoning her gaiters, and looking as bright as anything. "I took *good* care of her," she said, brightly; "and, best of all, I got along without calling you! I was up with her twice. For she did snore so, Mrs. Sumner, and gurgle, and choke in her throat: it was, for all the world, like old Quilp in Curiosity Shop; that is, it was enough to scare anybody out of their wits. Mercy! I couldn't sleep a wink. I got up, and put some goose oil on her nose; and both times she said, 'By dose is so gold,' and dropped asleep right off."

"Buther," croaked Lolly, "cub ad see by dose—it is so gweer. Ad I cad stir by eyebrows. By dose is sdiff, too."

"Gueer and sdiff" Lolly's nose certainly did look. It seemed to be coated with something resembling white of egg. Her efforts to speak had cracked this coating, and her brows bristled like a giant's. "Why, child of mine!" cried her mother. "Nellie, what *did* you put on Lolly's nose last night?"

"It was subthig awful gold," said poor Lolly, looking dreadfully abused as she divined that some mistake had been made.

Nellie's eyes were fixed on the stand. "*Were* there *two* bottles?" she cried at last.

"Yes, Nellie; and you have certainly put mucilage on Lolly's nose!"

Nevertheless, Mrs. Sumner and Nellie sat down and laughed. Even Lolly giggled a little, piteously.

"Delie," she said, "I forgib you dow; but, sub day, I will poud you."

"Poor Lolly, so you shall!" And then Nellie laughed again. Mrs. Sumner laid a soft, wet cloth over the poor stuck-up face, and let it remain for a short time; then the crackly coating all washed off, and the pretty brows and the long brown lashes came out as good as new.

Mrs. Sumner liked Nellie during all that morning. She was so helpful about keeping up the fires, and setting the table, and warming the calves' milk, and

feeding the hens ; and she buttoned all Lolly's things, and put her dress over her head so carefully, and brought her everything she wanted, and brushed and braided her hair so nicely, and got her so merry and chirk that the grown-up hostess confessed to herself that, with all her faults, she "wasn't the worst little girl in the world ;" and Nellie received a cordial welcome to stay and prepare for the Club.





CHAPTER VII.

AS CHRONICLED BY THE FIRST GOLD STICK.

MY throat is really very bad, and so is my side. I had nothing to say when mother thought I would better not go to little Lolly's Cooking Club. But all the same the tears came dropping. Mother is always right — but O, how can a little girl settle down to be an invalid, and devote herself to taking care of her health. I have had my pride in being delicate, and slender, and graceful ; but now I envy strong, healthy girls. I am shut from everything. I mustn't let the wind blow on my head, or against my throat. I can't be out early, because the air is too keen ; nor late, because the dew is falling. I mustn't study, because it is too exhausting ; nor sew, because it cramps my lungs. I must wrap, and muffle, and roast, and sit indoors, and look like a guy when I do go out — though what a guy is, I don't know. Mam-

ma is down upon the pretty fashion of ruffs and frills, because they leave the throat and arms so exposed, and upon the polonaises, because they are not so warm as shawls ; and upon the scant dresses, because one cannot wear skirts enough. I — Well, never mind !

I never longed so to be out of doors as this spring — not to “run and race,” as Mrs. Ledyard calls it, I’m too dull for that — but to bask in the sunshine, and tread on the grass, and be around among healthy, growing things. The flowers, and trees, and grass-blades seem so well and strong ; no side ache, nor hoarseness, nor tired-out-ness ; they scarcely ever die until the time comes ; they don’t die when they are only merry little girls. O, I can’t understand why I — I, merry Marion Halliday, should be sick !

Finally, mother said, “Perhaps I shouldn’t object, if it is a fine day, only that you would be sure to think you must leave the flannels off your neck.”

It is strange how one’s mother can read a girl like a book ! My one vanity is my slender, white, graceful neck, and my one care is about my ruffles and cravats.

“For you cannot go, Marion, if you must expose your lungs !”

I look so sick in red flannel. It brings out some-

thing so dreadful in my complexion, in my ears, and about my eyes. I look so waxen. I was ashamed to stay away, when it all rested with me ; still, it was a great trial to go as I did go. I looked like an old woman in the buggy, after mother got through with me. I might as well have been old Mrs. Crane. My cloud — when I had always prided myself upon wearing my cloud so gracefully — was wound round and round my head, and my hat was so tall, and my face so thin ; how I did look ! If you set out to make everything you wear useful and comfortable, you make yourself a fright, that's all ! And I had on a shawl — not my soft, white, scarlet and blue Moorish stripe, but what mother calls a "sensible shawl." It was her great double-fold, gray one, folded three-corner wise, *and pinned close !* and leggins, too, over my gaiters — all under an April sun !

When I got there, I was a fussy old woman still. I had my red neck-flannel on, though I must admit mother had arranged it tastefully, pinning it with a set of cunning little gold cloak-clasps, which used to be grandmother's. I wore, besides, mother's gray Shetland bertha, crossed over my chest ; and when I got my white cookery-apron on — well, I was a "figger !" I didn't wonder that Lolly, who was in a state of flannel equal to my own, greeted me as she did, when I emerged from the bedroom.

"O, you darlig ole buddle!"

"Bundle!" — that was just it.

I told Mrs. Sumner that Lolly and I were a pair! Lovely Mrs. Sumner; she really looked younger than I did.

"Prettiiness — the color and sparkle part — goes with good health," she said, gravely. "Little girls who sin hygienically, as you and my Lolly have, are usually paid off with bad looks. Nature knows what will punish girls; and it is rather queer to me that the girls don't learn her little secret."

Hygienic sins, yes! O, how I have pondered upon them lately. I wonder a girl in the neighborhood is alive! How many times we have sat in a nice, comfortable snow bank and told stories, played in the rain at recess, and sat in school all day after with damp shoulders and wet feet. I wonder we ain't, every one of us, walking with canes! My face ought to be wrinkles, and my complexion saffron, after the strong tea I've eaten, and the cloves; and my eyes behind specs, to punish me for burning a light to read, after mother believed me asleep. Well, I suppose the record begins to publish itself now, in my dull complexion, and my lean little figure — poor, little, coughing, dyspeptic, young grandmother Marion!

I ought not to think so much about myself; but O,

I do feel so bad this spring about everything. Mother's theory has been to inform me, and then trust to my good sense, my reason, and my conscience. I wish she had, instead, watched me and forbidden me ! Perhaps it is dressing so old, and hobbling about, that makes me write in such a grandmotherly style. But I do believe that we need "bringing up" as much as we ever did ; we are not a bit better fitted to *come up* of ourselves.

I meant things should move off brisker than at the Bread Club ; and I asked at once, who was to act as president in place of Lolly ? Whereupon Nellie Crane pirouetted out into the middle of the room.

"*I* am the young lady of the house. I've helped Mrs. Sumner all day, and know where everything is. To begin with, we're ready to begin. The flour is sifted, the lemon extract, and the eggs, and the goodies for the fruit-cake, and the sugar-pails, knives, forks, spoons, and tins, are all on the table ; for Mrs. Sumner says, 'a good cook gets all she needs set out, before she begins ;' and there'll be no muss and confusion, if things are done as I say, and *when* I say. Everything has been talked over, and I understand perfectly."

"Have we the Great Mogul among us ?" inquired Em Francis.

"So it would appear," answered Fanny, shortly.

"Nellie Crane, I would be ashamed! You always would be chief cook and bottle-washer! Besides, the Gold Sticks are on purpose to fill vacancies!"

"Now, little Fanny!" — but Nellie's face had lost its eager, happy look — "let us hope the pretty dear isn't envious. If the rest don't want me, though, I won't. But I thought you'd all see how convenient I should be. I know you don't, one of you, know where a thing is in the house!"

"And it's by wish, girls," put in Lolly. "Dellie has worked lige a dog all the bordig."

"And if 'Dellie' wants to work 'lige a dog' all the rest of the day, why, do let her!" added Nellie herself.

Caddy and I, who are the Gold Sticks, agreed that Nellie would be convenient; and Nellie said, if we'd address her as "Miss President," Fanny might give the orders and do the running; and then we settled down good-naturedly.

Sure enough, everything was ready, and as neat as a pin.

"I shall teach you cakes, which you will find convenient right here in Tu-whit Hollow," Mrs. Sumner said. "Fine party-cake is merely an accomplishment. The materials for these are in every housekeeper's pantry, and to be had at the village groceries. And now, let us play that we are to have the Sewing Soci-

ety here this afternoon, and must make ready in haste. You shall be the minister's wife, and the ladies, when tea-time comes, and eat the supper. We will have soft cake, Boston cream cake, cookies, and fruit cake. Which first?"

"Fruit cake, *of course!*" — That was Fanny Ledyard. — "It takes so long to bake."

"I should think we might better bake all the others first," said Caddy Golden, "while we are getting that ready. There's citron to cut, and raisins to stone, and currants to wash, and spices to grind, — and heaps of things."

"And I suppose we knows, as we has fruit cake every day at our house. 'Scuse your poor neighbors, Cad!"

I am sorry Fanny is so rude. I am afraid she *is* envious. Caddy colored up to her eyes.

"I thought Mrs. Sumner was finding whether we could plan the work."

"So I was, Miss Caddy, and you were right."

But Caddy had stepped back, and had sat down. She never lifted her eyes again, until everything was settled.

Fanny had the cookies. I was the leader of the cream cake, and Caddy took the soft cake. Lolly said *she* would read the receipts.

"See you don't get us mixed," Nellie warned.

Lolly read the cream cake: "Three eggs, one cup of sugar, one tablespoon butter, one teaspoon cream tartar, half teaspoon soda dissolved in one third cup sweet milk, one cup flour. Cream: One egg beaten well, half cup sugar, one tablespoon flour, stirred thoroughly into half cup milk. Cook, and when cold, add one teaspoonful extract lemon."

"This is by favorite cake," Lolly added. "Id never mages eddybody sig. Barion, you bedder make the creab yourself, for if id burds it is spoiled."

I came near roasting in my woolens over that "creab." In order that it should cook nicely, it was lifted off, and lifted on; every possible change was played upon the dampers and the hearths, and the mixture itself was constantly stirred, "for if you sgorch id, 'twill be horrid, Barion," Lolly warned me; and, for my pains, it came out smooth, and delicately golden, and was not "sgorched" at all.

I was buttering tins when Mrs. Sumner stopped me.

"That cake sticks on tin. I always use my Queensware pie-plates; and not butter, Marion, as a rule. In some butter there is coarse salt; in other there is buttermilk. In either case, the cake will stick. Nice sweet lard is always best. Success turns upon just such small things."

I had learned at home to watch the sweet loaves, so that one side shouldn't rise faster or bake sooner than the other ; and little Janie and I got the six plates all in at once, and then down we sat on the floor at either door of the oven, like a pair of penguins, each with a broom-splint to try it, and a holder to snatch it. They came out a beautiful, fine, moist, spongy yellow, mottled temptingly with brown ; and Janie and I came up on our feet, a fine, moist white, mottled with red. 'Tis the only way, though, with delicate cake.

We hurried the napkins over, that the cakes might steam, slipped the knives under cautiously, and were so proud because we didn't tear them at all. We spread them with the cream, clapped on the top cakes that we didn't spread, and there they were—two complete cakes ; for we had doubled the receipt, to have plenty for "the minister's wife, and the ladies," and just as light and trim as mothers could make.

"We shall have *something* for supper *here* !" cried Nellie, coming to my side. "Please, Mrs. Sumner, if it rains, and *you* send us home, divide the cake, and give us a piece in our hands as we go—'twould be some consolation !"

They all looked right at me. That made it so pointed. My cheeks blazed white,—they never do

pink up like other girls', — and the next moment I was sobbing aloud. It was foolish ; but they meant mother, dear, sensible mother, and I was so weak. I think I must, for many days, have been getting ready for a good crying-spell.

I couldn't stop when I wanted to. I dropped down into Mrs. Sumner's arms, and there I shook and cried. Mrs. Sumner could do nothing with me, and she told them to open the sitting-room door, and then she took me in, and put me on the sofa.

The girls were all in the door. "Nellie Crane, you awful girl !" I heard little Janie say — our mild little Janie.

I heard Lolly, too. "You have killed her, Dellie. Your dreadful touge ! You bost killed me last dight, and now 'tis Barion !"

Nellie said nothing. She stood back behind the rest, looking so solemn that I longed to go to her. I soon got my self-control again, but I couldn't get up for trembling. They all came and looked at me, and smiled, and covered me up — all but poor Nellie. Even Fanny. "Of course they hated to go, but ma said your mother did just right."

I was almost asleep, soothed with the pleasant voices and the clatter out in the kitchen, when I heard a door closing. I opened my eyes, and saw Nellie

Crane coming out of the bedroom with her things on. Neither to the right nor to the left did she look, but went straight to the front door. I sprang from the sofa, but she sprang too, and had the door open, and was out and gone. I called to the rest, but by the time they were there, Nellie was almost up to the corner. She was running as hard as she could go, and she turned the corner like a flash, and was out of sight.

O, dear me! how badly we all felt, as we stood there and looked at each other.

"That poor, hasty child!" Mrs. Sumner sighed.

"Such a sensitive, touchy set as we are!" Em Francis said. As for our little sick president, she cried.

I went back to the sofa trembling worse than ever. I heard Mrs. Sumner talking to them out in the kitchen.

"You can see now, my dears, that it is quite as needful for little girls to be polite to each other, and to refrain from speaking their minds, as it is in what we, your mothers, term 'society.' Should we, your mothers, criticise as freely and as openly as you do, what a state Tu-Whit Hollow would be in! Some one would *always* be putting on her bonnet and going home. We should have just such commotions and earthquakes as you in your child-world."

But I felt bad for Nellie. I blamed myself. In spite of her sharp tongue, she is a dear little one, and if I hadn't taken it so, her remark would have passed without harm.

When I did get out into the kitchen, Lolly called me to her. Such a grieved face! "Barion, I wish I didn't lige but ode of you. Thed I shouldn't care. Bud *don* I have two to please!" Poor Lolly!

We tried to go on. But the fun of the Cooking Club seemed all gone. Lolly croaked over the receipt for the soft cake once more, that Caddy might finish it.

"One cup buttermilk, half teaspoon soda, one cup sugar, one egg, one cup butter, one teaspoon cinnamon, flour for a soft batter."

I believe Caddy chose to make this simple cake for a most praisable little reason—being so often accused of taking the chief seat in the synagogue. Lately I have suspected her of having an ornament which we have never envied her—but which none of us possess, no more than her laces and her pearls—the "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." I feel so drawn toward her; and I used to dislike her, I fear. I begin to wish that no haughtier spirit went with our prints than with Caddy Golden's cashmeres and poplins.

Mrs. Sumner told us the knack of her soft cake, which I had often had at her table. "For one thing,

I never beat the egg. I mash the butter, egg, sugar, buttermilk, soda, and flour all together at once. Don't stir it. Get it out of your hands as quickly as possible. Its tenderness depends upon its being so lightly and so little handled."

Then we came to Fanny's cookies.

"Three pints sifted flour, one pint sugar, half pint butter, five eggs, two nutmegs, piece of lard size of hen's egg, teaspoon soda. Roll thin and bake lightly."

There was nothing beaten for this either. Fanny made a hole in the flour, and everybody that wasn't busy, getting ready for the fruit cake, put things in, and then Fanny worked the rich-looking mass into dough with her hands.

"My goodness, girls! We've forgotton the soda!" It was Em Francis; and it was a perfect shriek.

Yes, there our soda lay, a little white heap on the moulding board, just where Janie had rolled it. It couldn't be incorporated with the solid dough now. We all looked at Mrs. Sumner—for think of the good things we had wasted!

She smiled—nice woman—and Lolly said, "Never mide! I guess 'twon't break buther!"

"No," said 'buther.' "We'll simply begin again. Only remember to always rub the soda with the flour the very first thing."

"But what a waste!" deplored Janie.

"O, no. Part of housewifely skill is to fix up mistakes, and suffer no loss. I shall thin this paste to-morrow with a couple cups of sour cream, and make some loaves of nameless cake — my nameless cakes are often my best."

This time we were careful; and in a few minutes we had the tins in, sugar-crustcd, and baking fragrantly.

Then all hands fell at the fruit cake. That was not expected for tea. It would keep, and was to be sent to the next Club. This was the treat of the afternoon — for who doesn't like to assist at fruit cake and mince pies? Such heaps of goodies and sweetsies!

"One pound sugar, one pound butter, one pound flour, ten eggs, one cup molasses, saleratus to make it foam, two and a half pounds raisins, two and a half pounds currants, one pound citron, one cup currant wine, one cup water, cloves, cinnamon, and mace. Bake in a slow oven two hours."

"This is a capital foundation," Mrs. Sumner said. "In it you can throw rich ingredients at pleasure. I sometimes add chopped figs, candied orange, and frequently nut meats. Don't beat your eggs. Choose the darkest sugar which you know to be clean. Use coffee, if you like, instead of water, and you shall

have as fine and black a black cake as you ever longed for."

She let us all taste every time anything was put in—she really did! and if the cake is only half as good as the paste! She built the fire herself; filled the stove full of hard wood, let it burn until the oven was right, then closed the hearth and the dampers, and shut the cake-pans in. How quickly we had accomplished it all!

Caddy and Janie were washing the dishes, and the rest of us were setting the tea-table in the cool, pretty sitting-room, with its flowery bay window, when some one knocked at the side door. Mrs. Sumner, a glass of peaches and cream in her hand, opened it. It was Nellie, and Nellie's mother.

Mrs. Crane has such a keen, black eye, and such a low, sweet voice! Her hand rested upon Nellie's shoulder, and she smiled as she bowed—indeed, both ladies smiled as they looked at each other. "My little girl, Mrs. Sumner, has a word to say to you, I believe. I will leave her until evening, as I am going to the village."

She nodded to us girls, glanced graciously at our beautiful cakes upon the tea-table, declined Mrs. Sumner's invitation, and left Nellie with us.

We all always knew that there was an iron hand in

Mrs. Crane's velvet glove, and we were not surprised to see Nellie.

Perhaps I ought to have waited until Nellie's duty was discharged; but as the door closed upon her mother, the naughty little thing looked over at me, and I went to her at once.

"O, Maynie," she said, "don't think I came only because mother obliged me! I wanted to come; and I want to apologize before everybody, and say that I am spiteful, awful spiteful! But I *didn't* think we ought to have been sent home, sent so out and out, you know. We might have been *slid* out, and never have felt it. Lolly's mother could have done it."

Just then she saw she was making matters no better, and stopped. But I kept my arm around her. There is no shamming about little Nellie Crane, whatever else there is. She clung to me, and standing there in my arm, looking away from the rest, she choked back the sob.

"I *am* sorry, girls. I like Marion, you all know I do. And I like her mother pretty well; but, sir, I don't think she's as polite to children as she might be, so!"

No, Nellie couldn't sham. It really seemed to be laid upon her to speak the truth. I let it go. I could this time, somehow. And, besides, I thought secretly

that, maybe, mother, my own mother, really might have used some of the fine courtesy toward my little mates, for which she is so famous among grown-up people.

Still, I couldn't help but notice that Nellie, like all people with sharp tongues, whom I have seen, didn't bear frankness and plain dealing toward *herself* any better than anybody else! Queer, isn't it?

When I told mother, after I came home, it seemed to amuse her; but I saw that, for all, the color came into her cheek.

"I have since thought, myself, that I was rather peremptory. I might have insinuated the girls into Mr. Ledyard's buggy, I dare say. I rather respect little Nellie's indignation. She's a sort of Ithuriel's spear among you, I see. Excuse me to your friends, Maynie, and in future I'll be 'more polite.'"

Our tea was just beautiful. The cakes were, each, perfection. Mrs. Sumner — she *is* truly polite — Mrs. Sumner cut up all the cream cake. She said it was as harmless as bread and milk, and we might eat it the same if we liked! Wasn't that a thing for little girls to hear, though! And "the minister's wife and the ladies" did eat it all — every smitch. The soft cake was deliciously tender, and the cookies *very* rich. I dislike the common cooky, the kind that the dic-

tionary defines as "a small cake moderately sweet." That shows to me what sort of cooks Mr. Webster's wife and mother were — and I never take them when they are passed.

After tea we wrote down the receipts, and then Lolly asked whether "subud would propose the dext blace, udless the Club is invided subwhere."

Nellie at once said the Club was to come to her house, and it was going to be "pies." We all raised our hands for it; but I noticed that the prettiest and the whitest one, — the only one that wore rings, — went up reluctantly.

"Hadn't you just as soon?" I whispered.

"Y-es, only mamma said I might ask you to our house, and cook would teach us some nice desserts. But — " Here Caddy hesitated. "I don't suppose the girls would care to come to *our* house. I don't see why. Mamma would make it very nice for you. She goes to New York week after next, and it is the only time we could have you."

I would have laid it before the Club, but Caddy wouldn't let me. "No, Maynie. I can trust *you*, but the rest would only think I wished to show the house. They wouldn't be free and cordial at all, and they would take the silver, and the china, and the conservatory, and our ways, and our servants, all as so

many injuries to themselves. They would be stiff and cold, and we shouldn't have a good time at all. I know the girls, Marion. I guess I do ! ”

She was all but crying. Her back was to the rest, and she had no idea how loud she was speaking, nor that any body was listening. I didn't warn her, for it flashed over me that it was not a bad thing that the girls should hear what she said.

“ I have wished we were poor a thousand times,” she went on. “ Then I could have some friends. I am so tired of trying to be friendly.”

She quite choked up, and released herself decisively from my arm. Turning, she faced all the silent girls. She knew they had heard. Her face quivered all over ; but, luckily, Mrs. Golden drove up that very moment, in her pony phaeton, and Caddy went into the bedroom to get ready. I don't think any one felt very comfortable. But after a moment we followed into the bedroom, and helped her with her things. Everybody was silent and awkward, and Caddy never looked into one of our faces, even when her shawl was being pinned and her cloud tied.

But at the end, Nellie — bless her merry, fearless, little soul ! — made a dash out of it. She seized Mr. Sumner's tall, silk hat from the bureau, tilted it on her head, although it came quite upon her saucy little nose, and offered her arm.



She kissed her hand gallantly as they drove away. Page 107.

"Shall I have the pleasure of escorting her ladyship to her carriage?"

Poor, startled Caddy! Think how we must have treated her, that she should look frightened at Nellie's fun! But she didn't hold back sulky and offended. She met us half way. She laid her shawl on her "escort's" arm. "Much obliged to you, Mr. Nellie," and off they went giggling, in fine burlesque of grown folks' style.

Through the windows we saw Mr. Nellie touch her chapeau to the lady in the carriage, assist Caddy in, tuck the gay robes around her, and kiss her hand gallantly, as they drove away; and, best of all, we saw Caddy looking back at her, bright and smiling.





CHAPTER VIII.

NELLIE HAS AN IDEA.

FOUR long weeks passed before there was another Cooking Club. Lolly did not get well enough to go out, and Marian Halliday was ill, and the weather was bad. The girls did not feel like making merry while "Marjie" was sick.

But, at last, she grew better; and the weather settled into genuine spring, and the little Club took up matters where they left off; and there was going to be a meeting at Nellie's.

Nellie at once made up her mind to have a talk with her mother. She was a bright little copy, in nonpareil, of her mother—proud, hospitable, energetic, and generous to a fault; one of the future neighborhood rulers, the good genius of the festivals and picnics, and the money-making church dinners twenty years hence.

It was the morning before Club day. They were washing the breakfast dishes. There was a cheerful little clatter of china, the sun shone in warmly, the lilacs were in leaf by door and window, the hens were cawing noisily around the house, the calls of the men at the plows reached them from the fields, and over their heads the canary swung in his swing and sung fit to split his throat at the idea of summer; while his little mistress bustled from one duty to another, sympathized with him fully—even Mrs. Crane felt the contagious spring cheerfulness stirring in her veins, and smiled good-naturedly at Nellie's long-considered little remark,—

“Well, Mrs. Crane, I suppose that the next thing on the carpet is the Cooking Club?”

“I believe so, Miss Crane.”

When a specially good understanding existed, mother and daughter were respectively Mrs. and Miss Crane.

“Well, then,” continued Nellie, “there are a few words I want to say to you, mother. I want you to understand just how we are situated. I don't know what the matter is, but we haven't had the first best times at the Club—not yet. Things seem to go hitch-ity-hitch, someway.”

“So I have understood, Miss Crane.”

Nellie drew her mouth, and smiled. But she was certain, however, that something lay back of the various troubles seemingly caused by her own peppery temper. She went on: "Now, I don't want you to be offended, Mrs. Crane, or feel that I mean anything personal. But *I* think the *mothers* have meddled too much."

After due pause, Mrs. Crane made reply: "Let me make certain of your meaning, Miss Crane. At present, I infer that you could wish *your* mother to do differently."

"Well, so to speak, I do, my dear Mrs. Crane—just while the girls are here, you know; and, of course, mother, you will have to meddle extensively before they come."

"Alas, thanks. I am sure."

"Don't be sarcastic, mother! You know, yourself, that *no* children could play worth a snap not left by themselves at all, and a woman overseeing that everything went on proper! I want the girls to have a splendid time here—a *splendid* time!"

"Well, my dear Miss Crane, I certainly am obliged to you for your frankness; and if the absence of 'mother' will contribute—"

"Don't make it so dreadful, mother! You *know* it is *only so to speak*. Of course you will be the wheel inside that makes the clock go."

"Yes, thanks. And I will truly endeavor to keep in my orbit."

Nellie knew she was being "chaffed." Still she was oppressed with the need of making her wishes unmistakable. "But wouldn't *you*, mother, be pleased to know the Club had a perfectly royal time here? I want to do ourselves justice. I should like to be so proud of you, and of the easy, open-handed way we do things. Now, for one thing, about supper."

"Well?"

"I should like to have you say 'yes' to my plans beforehand, Mrs. Crane."

"Yes, then. If we come to grief, come it is!"

"That is a mother worth while. Mother, I'd like the Club to know you just as you are now. You will please keep that position—smile just a trifle more cordial. You can wink, if necessary—ready?" Nellie whisked an imaginary curtain off from an imaginary camera.

Mrs. Crane was accustomed to these goings-on of her impressible Nellie. She smiled, and suggested that whatever was to be, had better be made known, since, for ought she knew, it might be thought desirable to alter their residence to represent a section of the Alhambra, or to have a canal dug, gondola posts

erected, and a fleet of Venetian boats constructed. If so, it would, she thought, be needful to blow the horn at once for the men folks.

“Mother, how unmercifully you do chaff a little girl!” Indeed, Nellie was almost vexed. “If I am ‘horrid,’ I know how I came so. What an awful little girl you must have been, mother!”

“I believe they did use to call me so ‘down country,’” replied the black-eyed mother. “Supposing that now we hear the whole matter.”

“It is nothing very much, mother; only I should like us to have for tea whatever it would be nice to have—not just ‘pies,’ as we had just ‘cake’ at Lolly’s. I *should* have thought they would have had tarts, or trifles, or something! I want a *nice* supper; just such a—a—; well, mother, dear, just such an awful supper as children like. I don’t care whether anybody else ever had such things together on the table at one time or not. I want to choose some dishes out of our dinners, and breakfasts, and teas—the things that I like myself—and have them at the Club supper. *Will* you, mother?”

“Is that all? I had expected to provide at least a brass band, Chinese lanterns, and perhaps awnings. I don’t mind the ‘awful’ at all, unless, indeed, you wish for *pâté de fois gras*, truffles, or edible birds’ nests.”

"What's that, mother?"

"O, things that sometimes go with 'awful suppers.' I shall be pleased, Miss Crane, to have you submit your bill of fare as soon as practicable, that we may send for whatever indigestibles we haven't in store."

"Mother, I'll bet there isn't an 'indigestible' in the lot! I'll get the slate, and think 'em up, and write 'em down, and you'll see for yourself."

Nellie went to her room, and taking her big school slate down, shut herself in. She "thought 'em up, and wrote 'em down!" It occupied her a good hour. Then, with a brisk step, and a satisfied look, she went out and handed the slate to her mother.

Mrs. Crane gave the slate back, with a peculiar smile. "I am agreeable, my dear young lady."

"I thought you would be, mother. It is all sweet, milky things, that folks say are healthy for children; no soda, only in the biscuit, and not a dust of spice. Maybe it is odd to have no cake; but we couldn't have better than Mrs. Sumner's, so I rather not have any; besides, there *will* be that fruit-cake we baked over there. I believe I'll save this, mother, and hang it over the sink. It took me so long to think of all our different custards, I don't believe I should get them all again."

She went out with a triumphant swing to her skirts. But in the door she paused. "Only, mother, have you thought—? I don't a bit believe but that it will take all the cream for two days?"

"Perhaps, since there is to be so much cream coffee, *a la* all you want. However, your supper shall not be spoiled for lack of cream."





CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH NO MOTHER MEDDLES.

IT was a lovely day, and everybody was in a lovely temper. The two mothers, Mrs. Crane in doors, and Mrs. Nature out doors, had done all they could to get ready for the Club. The young grasses, soft and green, hurried gently by the sun, had got their carpet-walks spread by every road in the Hollow ; and the house was "spick and span," — nice fires and open windows, which was Nellie's idea of pleasant rooms.

The girls came in light spring dresses and white aprons. They had nosegays of crocus and daffodil and early myrtle, and all the vases in the house were brought forth and filled.

The president was rather late, for she and Fanny had the basket of fruit-cake to bring. They found all the members on hand excepting Caddy Golding and Marion—but they had hardly hoped to have her,

Just then, however, there was a smooth, swift roll of wheels, and everybody caught a glimpse through the windows of silver-plated harness, glittering carriage-top, and gorgeous affghan—the Golden pony phaeton. It was Caddy. She was by herself driving the milk-white ponies.

“My!” cried Fanny. “We comes in state when we does come!”

But, be it recorded to the honor of girlhood, nobody responded. In four weeks they had not forgotten a certain little lesson. Nellie was again ready with her tact—the tact of a good heart. She ran out to the gate, followed by the elder hostess. Caddy had stepped down, lines in hand. She turned to Mrs. Crane, hesitatingly, —

“I ought, perhaps, to have driven home and left the horses, for I see the men are out in the field. I never thought. I took the carriage, for mamma said Marion might be able to ride down—but she wasn’t.”

But Mrs. Crane had unhitched the tugs, and was leading the ponies from the carriage. “No trouble, my dear, I know all about horses.”

“I tell you what, girls,” said Caddy, as they went up the walk, “now that the carriage *is* here, we’ll have the good of it. I’ll take every one of you home to-night. You know I can take two at a time—won’t it be fun?”

I believe that each girl inwardly winced ; but as Caddie seemed utterly unconscious that anybody had ever been "bad" to her, they presently forgot it too.

"Now say, girls," began Nellie, as she led the way to the kitchen, "we arn't going to bake pies altogether to-day. We are going to have a jolly old supper, that's what we are, and we are going to cook *that*. It is part pies, but there are other things. For one, there will be a meringue pudding. Mother showed me, and I made one yesterday, so I can teach you myself. We must bake that first, to have it cool. Let me show you what we shall eat with it as sauce."

She went into the pantry, and brought out a large glass pitcher of thick cream.

"O, isn't that lovely?" cried Madge Hallet.

"That is just what it is! Cream through glass *is* lovely! Catch *my* mother putting the cream in anything but glass!"

Mrs. Crane was passing through the room. "Look out for the hitches!" she murmured in her daughter's ear. Then she closed the sitting-room door.

Nellie distributed the meringue things with a spry hand. "Here, Lolly, you are persevering ; you grate bread until there is a quart. Jane Graves, you are careful, you go into the milk-room, and dip two quarts of milk from the pan that stands by itself on the lower

shelf. Madge, you grate this lemon. Effie, you grate this one. Fanny, break those eight eggs, and let the whites run into this dish, and the yolks into that one. And you, you idle chatterbox of a Nellie Crane, you mosie along into the pantry, and bring a piece of butter the size of two eggs. Everybody hurry now!"

Nellie "mosied," and everybody hurried; and then the receipt was read.

"This is for one pudding; but we're making two, you know — for we'll have plenty at *this* house," Nellie prefaced. "Soak one pint of grated bread in one quart of milk, add one cup of sugar, grated rind and juice of one lemon, piece of butter size of an egg, yolks of four eggs: bake till done, then spread over a layer of jelly, beat the whites and add one cup of sugar. Spread over the pudding."

While it baked Nellie brought out the jelly, and everybody tasted. Lolly and Caddy beat the whites and the sugar to be in readiness. The rest were given other eggs to beat. Each was admonished to remember how many she had, that the receipts might not get mixed. "Yours, Effie, is the jelly-custard pie. Jane Graves, yours is a Marlborough. Mine is real custard, and yours, Caddy, is the lemon corn-flour."

"What makes you have 'em all *custard*?" asked Fanny, in evident disgust.

"Why, because — don't you like custard?" But the absurdity of so many custards began to steal over Nellie herself. She hurriedly quoted her mother. "Custards are simple and wholesome. Besides," added she, out of her own sage little head, "it is spring, you know, and I thought we would learn some Spring pies. Nobody has much to make pies of in spring except lemons and eggs, unless they have canned fruit left. We have thousands of raspberries yet, but — " (Here Nellie found herself again in deep water. She floundered for a moment.) "But I love custards so dearly, and mother knows so many nice ones, I thought we would just revel in them for once. I thought it would be just what you would all enjoy."

Nellie spoke rather imploringly; and at this stage the girls evidently had resolved to be polite. They said that custards were very nice, Fanny with the rest, but in a tone that Nellie must have resented, had not the meringue come out just then, and everybody become occupied in seeing the jelly spread, and the whipped egg and sugar laid over and properly browned. Indeed this first custard-dish was so extremely tempting that the whole Club fell to work again with a relish.

"And now for the Florentines," said Nellie. "We

must have a moderate, careful oven for them, and do them before we get tired."

This is the way: they made a rich pie paste, only they used butter instead of lard, and mixed it with cold, sweet milk, rolled it thin, spread it with butter, folded, and rolled it again into sheets one eighth of an inch thick. This Nellie spread with delicious pear preserves. Then it was placed in the oven. Meanwhile Caddy was whipping whites of eggs and sugar, which Nellie spread thickly over the preserve when she drew the sheets from the oven. After that she strewed them plentifully with the almonds Fanny had minced, sifted sugar lavishly on top of them, and placed the tins back in the oven.

These sweetmeat sheets came out beautifully pale and delicate, owing, of course, to the skilful tinkering with dampers and hearth. As soon as they were cooled, placing a strip of paper two inches in width upon the sheets for a pattern, Nellie cut them into diamonds. She laid those completed "Florentines" upon some gold-sprigged china plates of lavender-purple. Such a lovely bit of cool, bright color as it was. The young cooks could scarcely tear their eyes away.

"*Two* things all right! And now, hurrah for pie-crusts!"

But Nellie sent nobody to her mother's flour-chest—certain saving remembrances prevented. She brought flour and lard herself. "Caddy, six cups of flour, please. Jane Graves, three cups of lard. Chop these together, Fanny. Then, Miss President, you may mix and roll. Take water from this pitcher of ice. Flaky crust, or the fine floury kind?"

Everybody said, "flaky."

"Then you must mix as little—no—as thoroughly—goodness! what *did* mother say? Don't begin yet, Lolly: let me think."

Lolly waited. Nelly thought. The sewing-machine in the sitting-room was to be heard running at full speed. "Mother is awful particular one way or the other. I don't know which it is, though," she said at last. She finally went into the sitting-room. When she returned, she said, "Use the least water possible. Handle as little as may be. Roll one way all the time—from you. Bake carefully, and your crusts will be light and flaky."

As fast as the President could roll the paste the girls lined the deep plates. Jane Graves filled with the jelly custard. The receipt ran thus:—

"To one cup of raspberry jelly, add one egg and three table spoons of thick cream; bake without upper crust."

Fanny and Madge had the Marlborough pie. The apples had been previously stewed.

"One cup sifted stewed apple, one cup sugar, one cup cream, half cup butter, one well-beaten egg, some nutmeg. No upper crust."

Caddy was intrusted with the "Lemon Corn-flour," because it was so very bothersome, and she so very careful.

"The juice and grated rind of one lemon, one cup of water, one table spoon corn-starch, one cup sugar, one egg, butter size of small egg. Boil the water, wet the corn-starch with a little cold water, and stir it in; when it boils up, pour it on the sugar and butter; after it cools, add the egg and lemon. No upper crust."

Effie Graham had the "real custard pie." It was all Nellie could do to go from one group of the pie-makers to another, and to keep the receipts from mixing in her own curly little head. It was truly a moment of relief and satisfaction for her when all the pies sat on the table, filled to the brim, ready for the oven. "There," said she, "why is not this just as well as if our mothers had stood over us? Girls, after we learn a few general principles,—how to beat eggs, and that it takes four eggs to the quart of milk to make a nice, firm custard, and that you *must not* work your crust, and that you must roll it *from* you, and that it must

be mixed with ice water, — *I* say, anybody can make pies. Into the oven with 'em now! Forward! march! — lead off, Lolly."

Certainly Nelly had shown that she had the knack of getting work out of people, and of getting it done quickly too. But this time it was sooner said than done.

There were seven pies. Seven girls approached. It was found to be a nice piece of work even to lift the brimming plates. Seven pairs of small hands trembled like those of seven granddames. Lolly slopped hers the first thing. But, behold them at last — seven girls, each bearing a brimming custard pie ovenwards, elbows stiff, eyes fixed upon the plates, pretty feet scarce daring to step lest the sweet liquid should spill.

"The way to have done," said Lolly, at last, "was to leave some to be dipped in after they were in the oven."

"Why didn't you speak before, if you are so wise," snapped out Fanny. They were now at the oven, and Lolly was stooping with hers, when Madge Hallet cried out, "Ou! there!"

Her pie had slopped over. That was nothing; but the cry startled Lolly, who was still rather weak, and she let her plate fall, and there the jelly custard lay

on the floor, a *debris* of pink and white puddle, fragments of brown pie-plate and wet dough! The front of Lolly's apron was splashed from top to bottom; and, besides, of course, a tremor passed along the whole row; and, of course, every girl slopped her pie more or less.

Nellie, be it told, kept a smiling face. She recognized her opportunity. She caught after her ideal behavior, and grasped it. She shone forth. "Never mind at all," she said. "Perhaps, seeing that it is one custard the less, it is a good thing. So many custards *were* absurd; and, besides, the jelly custard is a great deal like the meringue. Who cares for who cares? I'll wash it up in a jiffy."

Here she paused to inwardly bless that mother, who, hearing the crash of crockery and the screams, still pursued the even tenor of her seam. "There's a lady for you," she secretly commented.

Nellie's politeness worked like magic. The little adventure steadied the young hands somehow, and they got the pies safely in. The splashed apron was sponged, the floor washed up, and the broken plate out of doors, all in three minutes.

"There!" said the hostess. "Who among us is not just as good as new? Now, Jane, you shall watch the pies. Caddy, you may grind this bowl of coffee.

I shall make biscuits, and then you shall all see me cook sugared apples and buttered apples, and after that the steak. To see me will be as good as doing it yourselves. Why not?"

"Coffee! steak! apple-sauce! for supper!" somebody was heard saying.

"Are you in earnest, Nellie?" Lolly delicately whispered.

Nellie answered aloud, with sudden heat showing in her face. "Perhaps you don't any of you like steak — porter-house steak — and coffee, and hot sauce. If you think you don't, we won't have it, of course. I was trying to be independent, and have what we really liked best; but I must say you're a nice set to please."

"O!" replied the girls, more or less pensively. All but Caddy Golden; *she* said, and some way everybody thought of dear Marion Halliday — "Steaks and coffee are always nice. *We* have steaks often for tea, instead of the cold meats. And everywhere one is asked there are canned fruits. It has made me hungry just to hear Nellie speak so appetizingly of hot sugared apples and buttered apples — they're just the thing."

"Well, I'm glad there's one. I'll bet you're an old jewel, Cad!" But, luckily, just here, Nellie remembered she was the hostess.

"However," she continued, "I say again, that if the supper is not going to be liked, we can have the regular company tea; for I know mother has plenty of the usual cake baked—and there is your fruit cake."

"Come girls!" said the President, in official tones; "I think we forget ourselves. Who ever heard of company dictating what they would and would not have for supper? Nellie, of course, will give us what she pleases."

Nellie was grieved and vexed; but while the rest were remembering themselves, she also called to mind how nice she had intended to be. She accepted the little veiled apologies and cordialities, and went on with her biscuit. She made a great dripper full, using one teaspoon of soda to one pint of sour cream, pricking each one twice, very accurately, with a fork.

The coffee was already bubbling fragrantly—not steeping, but really bubbling audibly, as Nellie went in to look at the clock. "Mercy! It is four now, girls. I'll bet those pies won't be cool; and a warm custard is horrid."

"Mother places a warm pie on pounded ice if we are in haste," suggested Caddy, not timidly at all, her faith in a smile or a frown being alike sincere.

So the back kitchen table was speedily covered with pounded ice, and the hot pies carried thither.

"I never can tell which way I like them best," said Nellie, as she produced the apples, already pared and quartered. "So I thought we would have them both ways. O, girls, I did hope you would think it nice to have such a supper!"

These tones of Nellie's always did coax the birds off the bushes; and they flew down this time also. Every girl was as interested as the little hostess could wish in the unorthodox apples.

"These are to be buttered. There are two pounds of the quarters. We put a quarter of a pound of butter in the frying-pan, add the apples, and sprinkle them with half a pound of sugar. Put them in the oven, and let them roast there slowly. We are to toast bread and dish the apples on that, with ever so much sugar a-top."

She then produced another pan with halved apples before the little crowd of cooks. "These have been soaking in sugar and lemon extract ever since before you came. Now we are to dip them in flour, and fry them in this kettle full of drippings. It must be boiling, as for doughnuts, and the apples are to be carefully turned. I shall serve them hot, with lots of sugar."

When the deputation to set table went in, Mrs.

Crane was not in the sitting-room. Nellie, glancing about, thought she understood. The keys were in the doors of the china closet, and a little pile of folded, glossy damask lay upon the table. "*Has* she trusted me with the best table-cloth and napkins? Mercy! I wish she hadn't, 'most! You are to take the gold-sprigged china, Caddy," she added, aloud. "Make the table beautiful."

Caddy did. There were some pieces of fine tinted china, and some silver, and some cut glass, all taken down beforehand from the sacred top shelf. Moreover, when she looked in the cupboard there were on a tray some little bouquets of window-flowers, one for each plate. "What a very nice woman, I shouldn't wonder!" Caddy thought. "I don't believe but she and mamma would like each other!"

Meantime she sniffed the steak. She was a healthy little girl, if she was the heiress of two bachelor uncles, and papa besides; and she felt wholesomely hungry, and wished the funny supper was ready.

Out in the kitchen the steaks were cooking, over a great heat, in two immense frying-pans. "I can fry as nicely as any broil," Nellie said. "And I can't broil good at all. And I can take pieces that isn't steak, and have them as nice as steak, my way."

Caddy, who supposed a broil the only legitimate

method, examined into this with some curiosity. She found Nellie set the empty frying-pans over a great bed of fiercely-glowing coals. When they were heated *very* hot, she laid the steaks, well peppered, upon the hot, dry pans, with not a sprinkle of salt. Within three minutes she turned them thrice. Then she ran to the iron cooking-shelf with the pans, where the platter, the butter, and the salt were in waiting. Upon the hot pieces she dusted salt, and laid bits of butter, and piled them a-top of each other, until, just at the moment when the biscuits were done, and the apples perfection, the steaks were all deliciously gravied and fragrant; and then the young cooks would not have exchanged the prospect for even a strawberry festival.

But, mercy! what a table. Every leaf had been put in, but still it was loaded. It looked like a mighty Thanksgiving table; and the great quantities of everything did strike the girls comically as they went filing in — Lolly with the heavy coffee-pot, Fanny with the platter, Caddy with buttered apples, and little Jane with sugared, Madge with the biscuit, Effie with nothing, and Nellie herself with two great pitchers of cream.

With great pride, Nellie surveyed the “spread” — there wasn’t a scorched thing there! With serene satisfaction she served cream coffee to the Club —

that is to say, she filled each cup two thirds full of pure cream, and upon it poured the hot, fragrant amber. She interdicted the sugar-bowl. "Wait until you have tried without—sugar spoils it for—for—epicures," she said, gravely.

Caddie and little Jane proved to be the only "epicures." The rest wanted sugar—at them, I fear, Nellie turned up her nose, as wanting in delicacy of palate.

"Does your mother always make coffee so?" asked Madge Hallet, with great respect, sipping the delicious draught.

"No-o, she don't;" answered Nellie, reluctantly. "But I've had some so often, when there was cream left in the pitcher, as I was clearing the table; and I always thought it would be splendid if anybody *could* have such coffee at table, and I thought at once it would be just the thing to treat you with when I found I could do as I had a mind. Isn't it *delicious*?"

They drank cups of it,—boys or girls could, you know,—but, for all that, the steaks, and the biscuits, and the buttered apples upon toast, and even the sugared apples, which Nellie told them were improved by having cream poured over them, received ample appreciation at the hands of the Club; but I don't suppose that any mother will lift her hands

when she reads that the various custard pastries met with a different fate, and that when Mrs. Crane came home she found upon the table nearly thirty of her small china plates loaded with meringue swimming in cream, and wedged-shaped pieces of custards, with the acute angles merely chipped of ; together with ten broken and disfigured slices of black fruit-cake, and as many crumbled Florentines. There were also *embarass du richesse* in the way of cold steaks, cold biscuits, and cold apple toast.

She smiled grimly, and wondered what was she to do.

I never heard what she did do. I know she didn't have any counsel in the dilemma ; for the Cooking Club was out at the gate, what wasn't in Caddy's phaeton, when she came home.

Happy, popular Caddy, for the first time since they came to the Hollow ! How she did devote herself to those girls ! The last load was Nellie, who must have been taken entirely around the outer rim of the bowl, to get back home again ; for she came back in the starlight and dew, and, having gone bareheaded, was as hoarse as a little frog. She groaned, remorsefully, at the piles of clean china, and at her mother emptying the dish-pan, and at the clock, which said " nine ; " and, strange to say, she went to bed cross, although

she had had her own way, and her mother hadn't "meddled" at all. How *shall* little girls be pleased, I wonder!

The President had quite forgotten, in the fun, to appoint the next Club. She never once thought of it, until she was getting down at her own gate. "You are no good at all as a 'Gold Stick,' Cad!" she said. "The Club would dissolve into girls in a hurry if it wasn't for Marion. We shall have to have it at Fanny's; and I shall be obliged now to go round to every house, separate."

But the next Club wasn't at Fanny's, although the excited little President did go from house to house, and on the wings of the wind, too; for, O,—events had taken place to render the next meeting of the Club a most remarkable time!





CHAPTER X.

THE POOR MEMBER OF THE COOKING CLUB.

IT was a memorable spring in Tu-Whit Hollow. After the sunny week, when Nellie Crane had her custard pies, the weather turned a sharp corner — back winterward. The little women of the neighborhood left off their pretty spring dresses, and hung them away again in the closets, and betook themselves, with a shiver, to the warm and well-worn winter raiment. The fathers housed their plows, and harrows, and hoes, and also waited upon the pleasure of the sun. A thousand pieces of work, in doors and out, came to a stand-still with a Pompeiian abruptness, it being about as inconvenient to have the heavens open as the earth. There were the handsome door-yards, for one thing, the pride of various mistresses, little and big, all swept and garnished during that sunny week, the borders and beds in readiness for

the seeds and bulbs which had been coming all winter from Vick, and Bliss, and Gregory, and from a score of other dealers to the flower-lovers of the Diamond Bowl. Tu-Whit Hollow had, for years, been down conspicuously upon the books of all the florists of the country. No matter what the artists had said about preserving the boldness and grandeur of the landscape, every woman in the Hollow believed her house looked better for a fine edging and finish of flowers; and so long as the farms themselves were reduced to a state of artificial perfection in the way of rolling, and grading, and fencing, I agree with them.

But the flower-beds waited, and the gardens waited, and the road-work, and the house-cleaning—in fact, everything and everybody waited for the weather to clear up, excepting the chickens. They put out their soft, downy heads by dozens, all over the Hollow, that rainy May-week. With all the rest, the Hollow was famous in the city markets for its early spring chickens, and the farmers' wives were likewise famous for well-filled purses of their own carrying and keeping; but that week the wives and daughters were all aghast at the prompt appearance of the pretty, chirping broods, and wondered how they were to keep them housed. The wee, toddling things, themselves, looked

about with their beady black eyes, and, I am told, wished that they had not so eagerly broken out of their own small, pearly houses. O, how dark, and warm, and cosy it had been in those beautiful silk-lined oval little palaces! They found the world, which they had been so eager to try, a cold, dreary place, with that drip, drip, upon the roofs of the coops, all day and all night; and they looked regretfully at the chipped walls of that fairy marble which no skill can restore, and sat, cross as could be, under their mothers' wings, and reproached those poor dames with the absence of the blue skies and green grasses, of which they had been told, and asked them if this was all of life!

In the houses, the little girls of the Hollow stood at the windows and fretted, much after the manner of the chickens.

"Dear me!" said little Janie Graves, ten times during one morning.

"I'm sorry that you are so dear to yourself that you can think of nobody else," said her mother, at last.

Janie always paid attention to her mother's words. She wondered, now, whether "dear me" was a characteristic mark of selfish children.

"Well, mother, I wouldn't mind so much, if I could

only know what the girls mean to do. Here I am shut up, and don't know a word of the plans. There wasn't a thing said at Nellie's about the next Club, and I haven't seen one of them since. Do you truly think the water is over my boots along the flats, mother?"

"It must be, I am sure. I went clear over shoe going out to the barn."

"But if you only thought so, mother, I could walk the fence, and go as far as Fanny's!" This was said as though it were a bright and sudden thought; but, in reality, the little dissembler had been revolving that idea ever since she awoke in the morning and found it still raining.

Mrs. Graves shook her head. Her Janie was a tolerable squirrel — but to walk a fence half a mile!

By and by Janie raised the umbrella and stepped out of the front door. She went slowly down to the gate. She splashed into the water before she was half way there, and at the gate it was a pool. She said "Dear me!" again, when she should have said "Dear mother!" Under the umbrella, on which the rain fell resoundingly, she gazed wistfully up and down the road; no getting that day to Lolly's, or to Fanny's. In each direction the highway lay under water, and the lower bridge was not to be seen; in-

stead, a broad, turbulent, muddy stream was rushing over the flats. The steady flaxen young head itself reeled the least little bit at thought of walking the fence along that deep, noisy flood.

She turned herself around in the pool, and went slowly houseward. She drew a brief old woman's sort of sigh, and words of prodigious wisdom followed the sigh. "I wish we didn't live on the flats! There is a nasty time every year. Our 'taters always grow watery, and our garden is late, just because it is always too wet to plow when other folks do." Little Jane's meaning is clear, I trust, although her grammar be faulty.

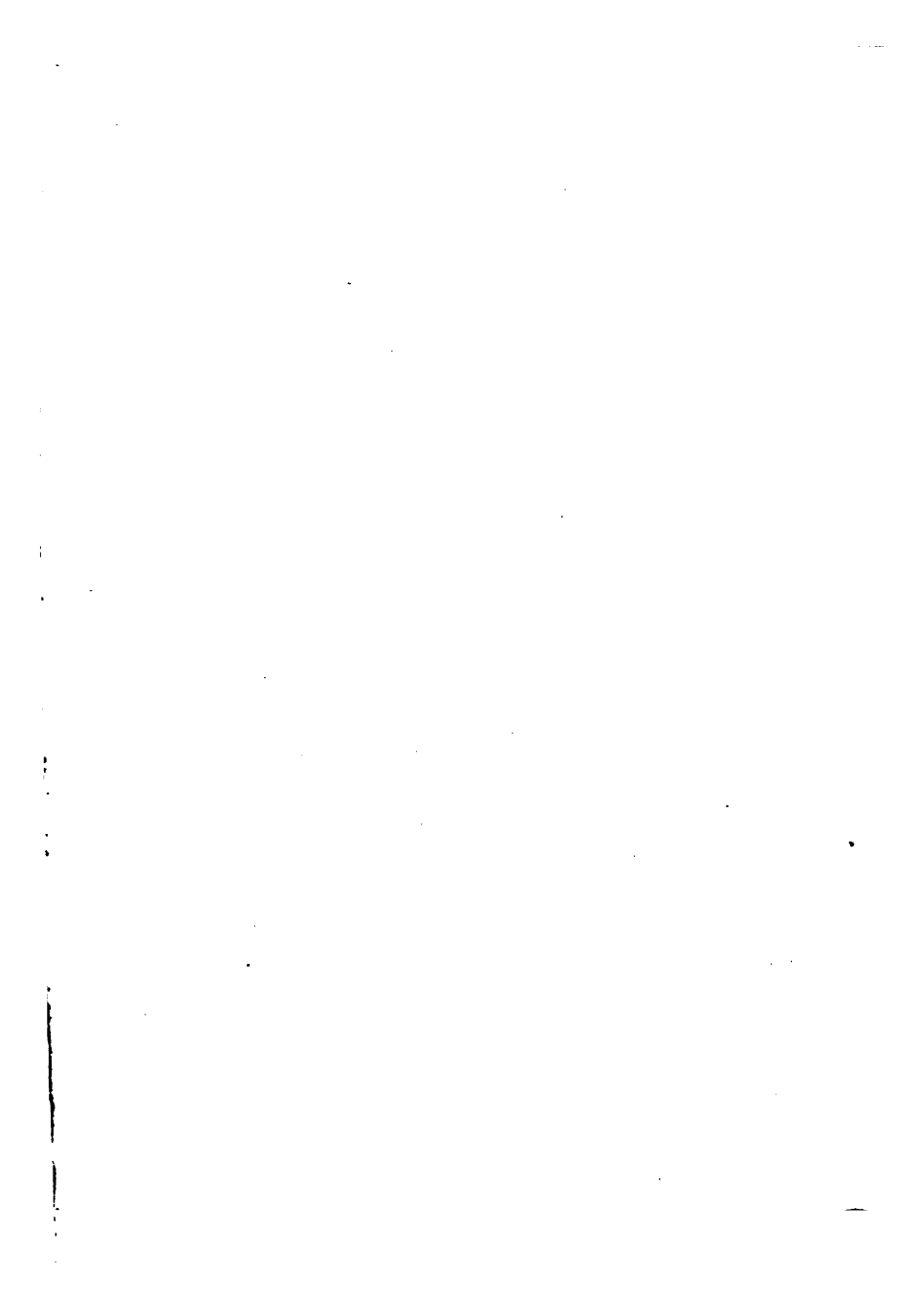
Then her own little girl-sorrows came uppermost. again, as she passed the nice diamond and star-shaped flower-beds, which, last week, she had dug so carefully — they now were dissolving slowly out of shape, full of little puddles. But the next moment they grew but a bit of the big trouble, a crumb of the generally ill-fated bread-and-butter — her mother's oat-field was a morass, the furrows of the newly-plowed corn-ground were filled with water. "And now our corn will be got in late again this year, and then, of course, the frost will catch it in the fall," sighed the little creature, who was so unlovable when she thought "dear me," and so pitiful and weary when she thought "dear mother!"

"Dear mother," when Janie went in, sat by a back window, sewing. She was pale and anxious. This rain was a matter for many dreary calculations, and her very heart had become weary of the steady pour, pour! trickle and drip!

This widowed householder was a good manager; but management is only two thirds of the battle. Money is the other third. A battle only two thirds won is, practically, lost. There were always for her heavy cares, unless it was in the midsummer, when, even to the poorest, food, and shelter, and rest from the toil of living, seem to come without thought.

This morning, with her eyes on her sewing, she still sees the steady rain penetrating the stable-roofs, that have for years needed re-shingling; sees it penetrating and pervading her wee stack of hay, and that the water has risen and is soaking it at the bottom also. Then her thoughts revert to the small wood-pile, where the wood and chips lie without shelter, all thoroughly soaked. She, as well as little Janie, wishes they didn't live in the very bottom of the Diamond Bowl.

There never had been great damages; never an actual freshet; she supposed there never would be; but the wet weeks early and late, the late and early frosts, the constant belating, and the constant





With her bare hands she tugged wet stones. Page 188.

cutting short of her operations, the constant small spoiling of her possessions,—it was all sorely discouraging to the poor woman landholder.

Janie watched the pale, serious face she loved so much, and knew it was the “time to be merry.” But she felt no heart for the loving little offices of chat and smile. Nevertheless, in another shape, she furnished the best sort of cheer at her command. She put on the old waterproof dread-naught and her hood, and brought in wood and chips “to bake” in the oven—ever so many ovenfuls.

“I have as many as nine fires ahead, mother!” she said at last. Her mother, passing through the back room, had smiled at the cheerful-looking pile, and the smile at once, as it always did, won little Janie into a glad coo.

After that was done, she went out in her stout boots,—the stout little boots which Janie needed afresh so often, that it constantly put afar off the time of re-shingling the barn and the house,—and attempted a piece of topographical engineering. She thought she could lay a raised walk toward the stables. With her bare hands she tugged wet stones and flat chunks,—boards floated so discouragingly,—and deposited them in the path. By and by, her mother, missing her too long, came to see. At the sound

of the door, the little bridge-builder raised herself with glowing cheeks and bright eyes, — glowing as a fresh pink rose she stood, to rest and to enjoy the motherly astonishment. “Don’t now, for I *shan’t* come in!”

“Janie, child!”

“Yes, and I wish I wasn’t a child! But still I can do something. I am as warm as a rabbit, mother; so just let me be an hour more, and *then* what I have done will amount to something; it would be just cruel to call me in now!”

Mrs. Graves, funny as it may seem, always respected her child’s wishes, when she reasonably could. She now closed the door, with a tender smile on her face. Some mothers may think it strange that Mrs. Graves could reasonably thus leave her little girl to remain in the rain. But Mrs. Graves, like most of the women in Tu-Whit Hollow, had several personal ideas; and she had brought Jane up according to a plan. She had accustomed her to courageously go and come in the rain and snow, and in cold weather, to never fear a storm while in motion, and to believe that no amount of wetting would harm her, if she jumped into dry clothing when she came to a stand-still.

“My daughter will be a moneyless young woman, and, for anything I can see, will have to rough it,”

she once said to Mrs. Sumner, when they were talking about their girls. "My idea is, that I musn't bring her up, like a tea-rose, in a warm place, till the time when she must earn her own living, and then toss her out. How do I know what she'll have to work at?"

"I like your idea, Mrs. Graves. Give Janie a good constitution if you can," Mrs. Sumner replied, thoughtfully.

"That is the one thing I have laid out to do. I've took note that girls with good constitutions aren't troubled with many mental woes. I've always thought that I'd try to keep her little stomach healthy, and her ankles stout, and her lungs roomy; and that is about all I can do for my only child."

But to do this there was a steady call upon a mother's tender self-denial. Mrs. Graves stinted herself of personal comforts to buy bright, warm flannels and thick-soled boots for Janie. Plenty of suitable clothing provided, she encouraged her forth in all sorts of weather. "*I* believe it is house-air, more than wrong diet, that hurts girls," she said to her neighbors. The Tu-Whit Hollow women talked a great deal with each other concerning the things which other wiser women were discussing at the same time in the Club-rooms and at the Congresses out in the

great world. Indeed, the Tu-Whit Hollow women considered themselves a part of the world, and did their share of women's thinking — and their thinking usually was of pretty fair quality. As for Janie's mother, she sometimes failed in refinement of phraseology ; but she made it up in sense, and was always sure of, at least, two respectful listeners — Marion's mother and Lollie's mother.

"Now you look at families," said Mrs. Graves. "The boys and girls eat at the same table — hot biscuits and preserves, and cake, same as the girls, and enough sight more ravenously. Boys, I've noticed, are always cramming with what is called hurtful things ; but still the boys have sound stomachs and are full of courage, while the girls that eat at the same table you remember, — the *girls* are dyspeptic and dreamy, and afraid of their lot in life. I tell you I shall let my Janie run !"

She did let Janie run ; and Janie flourished and grew sturdy, and delighted in adventures, and did not fear toil : no ; instead of that, having a sound mind in her sound little body, and a sound heart besides, she always was trying schemes to "save her mother" — at least, that is what Janie called it. For Mrs. Graves, herself, couldn't stand wet feet and wet shoulders, nor face a cold wind, without incurring rheumatisms, and toothaches, and coughs.

"You can't go and toughen a woman," Mrs. Graves said. "But you *can* do something with the rising generation of girls — that is, if you can stand brown-and-red, and cream-and-red for complexions, instead of white-and-red."

Mrs. Sumner laughed, but said that matter of complexion would be found quite a good-sized obstacle.

"Yes," said Mrs. Hallowell, "one fact is a fact as well as another. Brown-and-red and cream-and-red don't dress as pleasingly as rose-and-white, and there is no use in arguing that they do. They don't blend well with tinted silks and filmy laces ; they don't shade well ; and so both men and women will object to the change you propose."


Mrs. Graves had some conception of this æsthetic obstacle in the way of progressive hygiene. "Well," she said with a sigh, "*my* girl won't know much about that trouble. Her clothes, pretty likely, will be in tolerable harmony with her complexion."

Still the poor woman, trying to be strong and sensible, did herself do reverence to the ancient tastes in regard to "pink-and-white." She saw to it zealously that her Janie wore large hats and sun-bonnets ; yes — *wore* them ; for the little Jane was so uproariously healthy, she would gladly have dispensed with head coverings and gloves altogether.

"You *must* keep your head covered always, out doors, if you want nice hair," the mother preached. "Hair sunburns worse than skin. Exposed to the sun, it dries, fades, and scorches, and grows coarse. When you're sixteen, you'll be glad mother made you wear your bonnet. I want you to be healthy, but, Janie, be handsome, too, if you can!"

Actual practice always tempers radical theories; and as Janie grew older, Mrs. Graves still studied hygiene in its relations to beauty as well as to health. She couldn't abide to see other girls with delicate skins, and her Janie with a thick one — no, no! So she taught Janie, that if she wished to look pretty, she must bathe her face, and hands, and arms, every time she came into the house. Janie grew to relish it, and splashed in the water twenty times a day, like a born duck; and it really came to pass that Janie's stout little arms — a stout, working pair they were — appeared round, and soft, and plump, and taper, and her cheeks as clear, and her throat, and forehead, and chin, as dainty in tint, and contour, as even Caddy Golden's.

So, seeing that the little bridge-builder seemed rosy and happy at her work in the rain, she considered that the stepping-stones themselves would be very handy; and she went in and aired the child's fresh



stockings and flannels, and thought what a help and comfort she was — almost as useful as a boy! “If I had to guard her from every little thing, I don’t know what I *should* do!” she thought. “I’d as soon have the care of a set of egg-shell china as of a girl like Lolly Sumner!”

Janie’s “baked wood” was a comfort all day, and so, at chore-time, was the little bridge of love; for still it rained, and still the water came running down upon the flats. Even with the bridge, Mrs. Graves was obliged to put on the old pair of her husband’s boots, and to kilt her skirts.

While she was gone, Janie essayed to make bright the little evening world within the house. She builded fresh fire, swept clean the hearth, drew up the tea table, lit the lamp, — for the room was dark to-night at four o’clock, — let fall the curtains to shut out the watery landscape; and not a “dear me!” was heard while she was about it, either.

“I should rather like the sound of the rain — it’s so cosy safe in a house with a good fire — if we were rich folks, and had a good wood-house full of wood.” She thought thus, as she bustled about cooking “sugared apples,” like those at Nellie’s Club. “This *is* a cosy dish, if ever there was one,” she chirped, toasting both cheek and bread before the fire. “It

makes the very supper for two. I do hope we shall have lots of such cosy hot dishes at the Clubs."

Her mother could not remain insensible to the rosy atmosphere when she entered. Her smile of praise was like a burst of sunshine to her little Janie. The child fairly hopped toward her to take the milk-pail from her hand. "Let me strain it, mother, and you get ready for supper. O, mother, what good times just two can have if they only know how—can't they?"

Janie had made "a good cup of tea," after Mrs. Sumner's fashion. The teapot had been scalded, every vestige of tea-leaf removed, and the teapot dried. When it was time to make the tea, the pot had been set on the stove, and heated *hot*. Then the tea had been put in—one heaping teaspoonful for mother's two cups—without any water, the cover clapped down, and the dry tea heated through. After that the two cups of boiling water had been poured in, and the teapot left on the stove, just a second, for one good hearty boil-up, and then immediately removed; and was not the whole house pervaded by a delicious apple-blossom fragrance from that tea? and was there not for the partaker a fragrant flavor, indescribable?

As she sipped it, Mrs. Graves was secretly fearful

that she shouldn't sleep a wink ; but still she drank it, and told Janie, every time that she was asked, that the Cooking Club tea and the Cooking Club apples were very nice indeed, and that the Clubs were worth while, and that she hoped they might continue. With her little girl she tried to grow oblivious of the sound of rain, and to realize that a season of rest was divinely set between to-day's troubles and the troubles of to-morrow, and that, perhaps, it was as much her duty to observe it as to observe the Sabbath.

"It *can't* rain forever, you know, mother," Janie said. "I have seen the rainbow this spring, and that is the Promise. And, any way, things go right on—they always have—don't you know they have, mother?"

So they laid them down to sleep ; and the rooms were warm and faintly fire-lit ; lovely shadows flickered on the humble walls, and the splash, splash, pour, pour, went on, and seemed, at last, to join with the rosy shades in weaving a spell of drowse and slumber around the house.

The Cooking Club tea did not keep the weary householder awake. It was not her nerves, but little Janie's, who never drank tea only at the Clubs, that quivered and stirred, and finally put an end to the delightful, restful repose into which they had fallen.

"Mother, mother! I am sorry to wake you up, but the water is making such a queer sound somewhere!"

Mrs. Graves sat up in bed at once. The rosy shadows had gone out, and the house was dark. Those who are attended by care, instinctively know the time of night, and whether danger is near. Mrs. Graves felt that it was about eleven, and she distinctly heard the sound of which Janie had spoken.

"Janie," she said, "I'm afraid the water is running into our cellar." She stepped from the bed as she spoke.

"Will it do hurt, mother?" Janie was dressing, too.

"I don't know."

Getting a light, they went down cellar. On the stairs they paused. Mrs. Graves held the light over the scene in silence. Her teeth chattered when, at last, she spoke. "I was afraid it was so. It must have been running in some all the afternoon to have worn a place for such a large stream."

The cellar had not the usual wall rising from the bottom to the sills of the house. Instead, it was simply a square place, hollowed in the clay, and extending only beneath the sitting-room, leaving upon three sides a bank some four feet in width, upon which rested the foundation-walls of the house. On

the fourth side, the ground stretched away under the remainder of the house. Around this queer little cavern were rude bins, while on the higher level surface stood an assemblage of jars and cans. Within the bins were the diminished stores of potatoes, apples, and turnips, upon which, now, through two orifices in the house-wall, two streams of water were steadily pouring, running across the ground and down the side.

Mrs. Graves understood too well the state of her stores ; and even while they stood there, not knowing what to do, there was a heavy slide of soaked clay down upon the potatoes.

Janie spoke first. "Never mind, mother. It can't have hurt things in this short time ; and I know we can dip it up. I'll put on my shoes, and you can stand on the bottom stair with two pails, and dip, and I will run and empty them. It can't run in as fast as I can carry out."

Mrs. Graves could see nothing better to do. Placing the lamp upon a barrel, and lighting another up stairs, at this task they flew.

But it was a long while before they saw much difference in the height of the water. They could tell by the wet line upon the bin-boards at just what rate it lowered. At first they labored cheerfully ; but as

time wore on, they toiled in silence. It was at the forty-fifth pail that Janie paused.

"Mother, how pale you do look! Is the water so cold?"

"Cold? I don't know as to that; but, dear child, don't you *see* that the water is gaining on 'us now? The holes are wearing larger all the time. We might work here all night, and it would do no good."

Mrs. Graves set down her pail, and straightened painfully to a standing posture. She looked ghastly in the flickering light of the lamp, surrounded by the blackness of the cellar. "Child," she moaned suddenly, "that steady pour makes me sick and giddy. We never can get this water out in the world! What shall we do? Our things will be ruined!"

"Could we get them out, mother?"

"We must. I wish we had done that at first. They are all wet now."

Janie came farther down, and reached over into the potato-bin. The potatoes were not wet on top, only where the clay had fallen. "I can pick them out, mother," she said, cheerily. "My dress is short, and I can get over in there like a mice!"

They agreed it was the only thing left to do. Mrs. Graves brought empty barrels from the chamber to the back room; and then she carried thither the pails

that Janie filled. But in less than an hour they were obliged to abandon this work. The vegetables were by that time under water, and the water was ice-cold.

"There, that must do, Janie. See how that bank is washing. I am afraid it will cave in. We must hurry, and get out our canned fruit and the jars."

She stepped down hurriedly into the water, which now reached to her knees, and clambered up on the soft, shelving, sliding, washy ground as best she could, since she dared not trust Janie's strength with handing down the heavy jars. It taxed the child heavily, indeed, to get them up the stairs. Lolly Sumner could not have done it.

"Now, hand me the lamp, sis."

"Mother, have you thought of anything to do?"

But Mrs. Graves silently made her way—there was not room on the ground to walk upright—toward the wall. The streams were now the size of her wrist. She discovered also that through several other places the water was softly and subtly oozing; and fears for the safety of the walls took possession of her mind.

"Are you thinking that we could stop it with something, mother? Couldn't you stuff cloth in? I'd bring you things from the chamber."

"I don't know, dear; but —"

Janie splashed out of the water and up stairs as fast as she could go. She was gone but a moment. It was a queer assortment which she brought—old waists, two pink print sacques of her own, an old shawl, worn stockings—half her mother's store of carpet-rags.

Rolling them into a bundle, she managed to toss them within reach. Mrs. Graves concentrated all her strength and presence of mind, and carefully stuffed, and calked, and wedged them in, Janie bringing a stout carving-knife with which to push and shove them more compactly. Finally, the streams were stopped; and, with a joyous cry, little Janie sat down upon the stairs, and buried her face in her apron; while, painfully, Mrs. Graves made her way down the muddy bank.

They both were wet to the knees, muddy and shivering. But thankfully—O, how thankfully—they closed the cellar-door! How blissful the silence from that dreary, pouring stream!

Janie built a fire while Mrs. Graves brought dry clothing. "We will not worry, sis," the mother said, in a light tone, seeing how pale was the little girl. "We have enough potatoes out to plant, and to last the table, and the fruit and butter are safe. Things might be much worse."

"But how will the water be got out, mother?"

"O, in the daytime there will be a way; for to-night let us simply be thankful. Put on the coffee-pot, and we will have a bite, and get thoroughly warmed, and go back to bed."

With a delicious sense of rest, they sat and dozed before the fire, while the coffee bubbled on the stove; when, suddenly, both rocking-chairs came to a stop, both heads raised with a gesture of terror, and they got upon their feet.





CHAPTER XI.

DARK HOURS.

“O MA! The water is coming in again!”
Cellar and pantry doors were fast closed, the fire was crackling; but yes, the sound of pouring water was plainly to be distinguished.

Without a word they went to the cellar-door. The lamp shone ghastly on the dark square of water, revealing the heavy, muddy bubbles, where the stream was again washing down the clayey bank.

“Well, I don’t suppose there is any actual danger,” said Mrs. Graves at last, with an attempt at smiling; but there was a piteous quiver of the lips instead of a curve.

“*Could* the wall cave in, mother?”

“I really don’t know, dear.”

“Would the house fall, if it did, mother?”

“I don’t know, dear.”

And poor Mrs. Graves didn't know. How could she know, there at midnight, with that dismal pour in her ears, her cellar filling before her very eyes, and the rush and roar of the rain without?

Vague remembrances of "men's talk" haunted her—poor soul! She had never attended "high school," and in common schools, in her day, Natural Philosophy was not taught. But was there not an axiom that water could not rise higher than its source? She could not think the Diamond Bowl would fill higher, or so high, as the level of her house-floor. Spreading over the surface of the flats, it would not, probably, become a raging torrent, to flow, and run, and rush against her walls, to batter and break them in. Still, as she had told Janie, she didn't know.

"We can't do anything more, as I see," she sighed. "We might as well close the doors, and sit quietly by the fire until daylight, and then something can be done."

"That's just what I think, ma," said little Janie; but, even as little Janie said it, there was a curious splash, followed by a sudden flow of the stream in enlarged volume—a stone had caved in, a stone from the wall.

"O, ma! I know the wall will all tumble!" cried Janie. "I'm going to get the neighbors—that's what. I am going to do!"

Mrs. Graves was as dismayed as Janie. Poor, clinging soul, brave and wise for her child, but only a child herself in physical endurance — how often she had fallen down on her face going along alone the uneventful path of her commonplace life — fallen down, and thought to rise no more.

“Then I shall go with you, Janie.” She put the lamp down, and went to the stairway for the faithful old boots and the lantern. “I don’t know but it is the only thing left for us to do.”

Silently they pinned heavy shawls, and tied thick hoods. How strange it seemed, how long ago, that cosy fire-lit going to bed at nine o’clock, that sweet, secure two hours of sleep among the dancing, rosy shadows!

They turned down the light, shut the hearth, and unlocked the door, the house dim and silent as death, save for that steady pour of water into the cellar. From the world without they both shrank back, and paused in the door-way. It was terribly dark — rain poured thick and fast; but, dark as it was, there was everywhere a gleam, a black water-gleam. They could not see the great bridge at the left, nor the tall poplars, nor the mills at the right. Mrs. Graves was not at all an imaginative woman, but she thought of the awful lonesomeness of Noah when at night he



Jane's way out of trouble.

looked forth from the ark upon the rain still falling, still falling.

Silently, after the first shock of the darkness, and the rain beating in their faces, they stepped from the door, Mrs. Graves going into water up to her knees. Instantly they caught each the other's hand, steadying themselves ; and then there was another moment's pause. But neither spoke of going back. Holding by each other, they essayed to go on. They could step now quite securely ; but at last the uneven ground gave poor Mrs. Graves a sudden stumble, the broken pane of the lantern turned to the weather, — a puff, a flicker, and a flare, and it was out ; and there they were, in the rainy, heavy darkness. "It would have gone out, any way, there was such a little piece of candle," said Janie, encouragingly. So, without it, they slowly, hand in hand, made their way down to the gate ; at least, they came by and by to the fence.

Janie felt about. "Ma, we have not come in the path at all," she said. She was wet almost to the waist, her hood and shawl were soaked, but she said nothing of that.

Then Mrs. Graves felt about. "I can't tell in which direction to feel for the gate," said she, with stretched-out hands.

Janie could not even see her. "Let's get right

over the fence, ma, where we are, and not take a single extra step."

"No, child, we must find the gate; for if we don't, I shan't know which way to go. I am completely turned round."

"But, ma, if we keep hold of the fence, it won't make any difference which way we go. One way we should go to Mr. Ledyard's, and the other way would be Mr. Sumner's, and either of them would come and help us—don't you see?"

"But we mustn't go to Mr. Sumner's, Janie; for we couldn't keep the middle of the road after we found it, and if we went along the side we should be off into the mill stream before we knew it. Besides, I can't walk that fence."

"O, no we wouldn't, mother. I know those two knotty fence posts just before we come to the stream, and I will go first, and you keep hold of me. And you *could* walk it, mother, if you kept hold of me."

Janie was now over the fence, and Mrs. Graves was getting over as fast as her soaked clothing, heavy and clinging, would permit. As soon as she was down, Janie took her hand tight in one of her own, and then, with the other, she felt along the fence in the direction, as they both concluded, of Mr. Ledyard's.

But soon with each step the water seemed to grow

deeper; and all at once little Janie's feet suddenly swam from under her, and snatching her hand from her mother, she clung to the fence, crying, "O, I'm drowning! drowning! O, mother!"

With fierce strength Mrs. Graves caught after her; dragging her back, and holding her up, she placed the child again on her feet.

"O, mother, we can't go — can we?" she cried at last, shivering, gasping, and sobbing, but standing upright.

"No, we can't, my child," shivered Mrs. Graves.

They made their way back through the water, and the rain, and the darkness, to the point, as nearly as they could judge, where they had got over the fence. From thence they went blindly toward the house, hand in hand. "We must be somewhere near by this time," Janie said; and as she said it, she stumbled over something, and fell, face down, upon something else. She was crying when her mother lifted her upon her feet again; but she was only a little girl, you know, the very youngest member of the Cooking Club, and Mrs. Graves' brave weather-training had never taken in midnight walks through water two feet deep, with no lantern.

"Never mind, mother," she said, cheerily, wiping something wet and hot from her face, which was

neither water nor tears, something wet, and hot, and red. "I have found out where we are, at any rate. That was one of my star-flower beds that I staked so firm; the boards never gave a bit when I fell on them!"

Finally, after many more slow and careful steps, with hands thrust out helplessly into the darkness, they suddenly brought up against something—the house. "Now, you stay here," said Janie, "and I will feel along, and find the door."

"No; if we lose each other, we never can find each other. You keep hold of my hand, and we will feel along together."

With their hands sliding along the boards, they stumbled along, and by and by came to a window. Mrs. Graves examined it. "This must be the parlor window," she said, at last; "but which way to go from it I can't tell."

"But if we keep on round, either way, mother, and keep hold of the house, we shall find the door—shan't we?"

So they kept on. Mrs. Graves stumbled into the rose-trellis, and against the lilacs, and over the snow-ball bush, and then, at last, the door was reached, just as Janie began to think it had been spirited away, like the enchanted doors in fairy tales; and wet, and

muddy, and exhausted, they went in, and sank down into the nearest chairs. They had not the life left to draw out the hearth, or to lift the blaze of the lamp.

All at once said Janie, "Mother, I don't hear that water in the cellar—do you?"

Mrs. Graves listened. The dreadful pour had ceased. She wondered that she had not missed it. Janie took the lamp, and they dragged themselves to the cellar-door.

The cellar had filled to the place where the wall had given way, and had, moreover, evidently risen to the height of the water without. Only three of the steps were now visible. The dark, still surface was dotted with floating apples; but it was the utter silence, the stillness, which was so appalling to them, following upon that dreary pour of the flooding water. The sensation was akin to the stillness that falls down when a life goes out with piteous struggles, and silence and stirlessness settle upon the quivering limbs. Mrs. Graves shuddered, turned helplessly against the wall, and fainted.

Poor little Janie! She knew her mother's faints; she knew they lasted but a moment; but she gave a sob as she set down the lamp, and ran for the camphor.

But even as she knelt by the prostrate form, she

sprang again to her feet, her cheeks blanching in a deadly way. All around her there was a sound as if the heavens had opened, and the floods were falling. It was rain, it was wind, it was the sound of a river flowing about the house, over, under, in — yes, *in*; for the door flew open, and in came the water even to her feet. To her feet? No, to her knees.

O, was it real? Or was she in her own warm bed, by mother's side, in deep sleep, and this but a dream? She tries, O, how she tries to wake, but she cannot!





CHAPTER XII.

AS RELATED BY THE SECOND GOLD STICK.

WHEN papa read prayers this morning, I wish he might have added, "and for wisdom in setting our house upon a hill, O Lord, we thank and praise Thee!"

Poor Mrs. Graves! Poor Janie, poor, brave Janie!

I am so glad they were brought here, where they need not be moved, and where they will be a trouble to no one, and where they can stay until something is done. It makes me cry to look at Janie; there is something so dreadful about her to see. Her hair has not turned white, not literally—but she is gray and aged all over. I asked mamma if this were not a true tragedy, and she said it had only just missed; and she said that, as I had always wished to see a "heroine," I might now be gratified, for Janie was one.

She sits by her mother's bed in my cashmere wrapper — it trails on her — the muslin ruff up to her ears, and looks like a poor, cold, little white wax-berry. I think, should she cry more, she would feel better, more natural, more like a little girl again. I feel as if she would never get back young again. How strange it must be to become very old in one night ! Mamma says she lifted, and strained, and remained wet and exposed so long, it is a question whether her health is not ruined for life.

Marion came over to see her to-day ; and O me ! they sat and looked at each other, and coughed, — only Marion coughs pink, and Janie coughs white, — I mean their cheeks. And when she went away, she kissed Janie, and her eyes were so large, and beautiful, and full of shining light and moisture ! “You must get well, little Janie,” she said. “We want to see what a wonderful woman the brave little girl will make.”

Little Janie's silvery yellow lashes closed together on her cheeks at that ; for so many have been here to see her, Janie knows she is thought to be almost a Grace Darling, though I don't suppose that is it quite. But she has shown, mamma says, how strong and sensible even a child may be. She looked up at Marion more like herself than I had seen her at all.

"And you, too, Marion," she said. The drops fell from Marion's eyes then—dear Maynie. Then she smiled. "I am certainly going to try, Janie. I am sure I can get well in Florida, among the oranges, if I can anywhere."

She kissed me, too, as she left ; but she seemed to think only of little Janie. Well, I don't mind ; for were I so near to die, as mamma says Maynie is, unless she is helped, I think I should forget only what is lovely, and true, and unselfish, like little Janie. And could I ever have lived through such a night as Janie did ? I wish I might believe I could. I wish I might believe that I have spunk, and clear sense, and presence of mind, and what mamma calls "the long pull." I do think these things about people are the very "vital sparks." I can't bear to think that they are not in me as well as in Janie. I cannot bear to think that all that I have is given to me from the outside, *put on me* by wealth—for those things could be taken away, and *then* what should I be ?

But how could little Janie have got her mother up stairs ! How could she have borne that dreadful moment when the water came rushing down upon the house, and the door came open, and it flowed in all about her ! It was a frightful moment even here, even here upon the hill, papa's safe, high hill.

I had been asleep. I always can sleep sweet when it is raining, and the wind blows, and the house is lighted and warm. I remember thinking, right in the midst of my prayers, how cosy it was, and how pleasantly life had been arranged for me. Mamma's sleeping-room and mine both are spacious, and both have open fireplaces, as papa thinks that is the best mode of ventilation. So, when it is the least damp or chilly, Mrs. Dickson knows she is to light bedroom fires ; and I do think it is just delightful going to bed by one's own fire. Papa says I have a way of enjoying things, as if I had once been a shivering street-beggar ; but mamma says that is nothing against me. I remember that night mamma sat at the piano, playing a theme, soft and slow, and reaching, like hands stretching out toward heaven, and papa had come up in the carriage from the mills, and sat reading. I could look out from my pillows—for mamma allows my door open, telling me that, as no other baby came to take them, I have kept every one of my little baby-privileges—I could look out and see the bright room, with its light, and flowers, and pictures, and hear the music, so that it was scarcely more than a step into my lovely sleeping dream.

I was dreaming of Nillson. In my dream it was last winter, when I was in New York. All at once

her lovely voice gloomed right off into a bass that shook the house, and she hurried across the stage in a trailing night-dress, and wringing her hands. I cried out, and woke ; and O, such a fright as it was ! for, though I was in our own house, the house seemed full of thunder, and mamma was standing in the sitting-room in her night-dress, helping papa to hurry into his clothes ; and O, how it rained, and mamma would stop and wring her hands !

I ran out there too, and asked mamma what it was. "Why, didn't you hear it ?" she cried. "We fear the dams have broken away."

"Papa's dams ?" I knew at once it would stop work and take money. But that was not it ; for mamma answered, "Yes ; but, child, have you not thought, there is Mrs. Graves — her little house stands right on the flats, and she and her little girl are there alone, I fear — do hurry, Richard !"

Papa looked nearly as pale as mamma. He went into the kitchen hall, and spoke to the men, who, it seemed, were up too. "Don't wait to go and see," he said. "Load the boat on the wagon at once, and I will join you !"

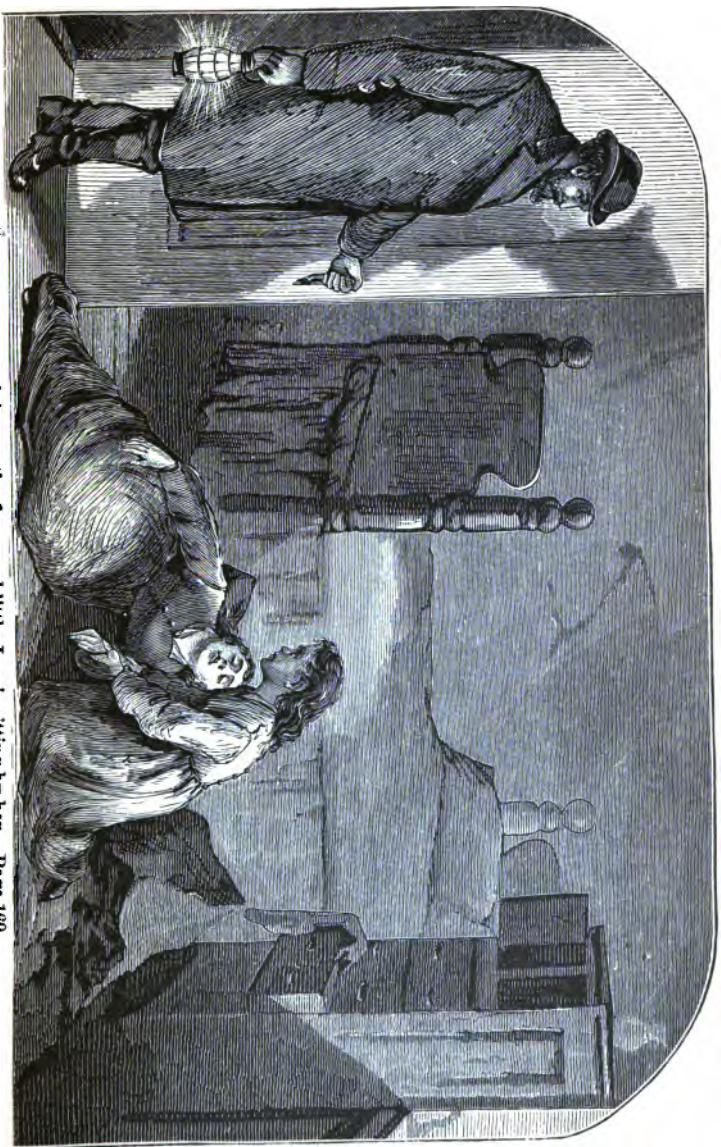
In three minutes they went rolling out of the gate — papa, and Dickson, and John walking, and the great white boat loaded on the wagon. They had the big

farm-horses, and they all carried lanterns, and the rain shone and glittered like fire all around them, as they went on with the lanterns; and O, such a rush and roar as there was afar off. Mamma looked after them—she and I both stood in the door—and she called after papa to bring them whether they were in danger or not.

I asked mamma if I might dress and stay up, too. She said, yes; and that she was glad I did not care to sleep when people that we knew might be having their home swept away, and perhaps be losing their lives. Mamma and I sat there a long, long hour. During the time she said she should like me to be willing to go up stairs, and leave my room for Mrs. Graves and Janie, as indeed I was. Mrs. Dickson was up, but mamma went down more than once to see that there was hot water, and she brought out wrappers and under-clothing of her own and mine, and then she brought the medicine-chest. She did not seem able to sit still and wait.

At last— But let me tell what papa said was going on down on the flats during that hour.

They could not get any nearer than the mills with the horses, for the water was so high. They put them under the sheds, and then they launched the boat, and rowed across to Mrs. Graves'. If there



Mrs. Graves was lying on the floor, and little Jennie sitting by her. Page 169.

had not been a light there, they never could have found the house. The water had laid the fence flat, and they rowed right up to the house. They called, and called — papa said — but nobody answered. But they were certain there was a light. They rowed around, and at last they found the door, and it was wide open, all dark and empty, and the water was away up above the high, old-fashioned window sills, all over the carpet, and in the bedroom up over the bed, and the chairs were tipped over, and floating. Nobody answered ; and papa waded into the room ; and then he saw the chamber-door was partly open, and a faint light shone down the stairway.

He went up, and there they were. Mrs. Graves was lying on the floor, and little Janie sitting by her, trying to hold her up, chafing her hands, and talking to her, and trying to keep her alive. Only think, what that child had gone through ! Mrs. Graves had fainted just as the water came upon them, and Janie had lifted, and dragged her, step by step, up the stairs, and all that while Mrs. Graves hadn't revived to know anything, only to lie and moan ; and then Janie knew the house was filling up with water, and that perhaps it would be swept away, and they both be lost ! When I asked her what she did, she said she said over her mother's prayers, and put the

lamp in the window to guide the angel right, if God sent one.

Papa said Janie was dripping wet to her very waist. She had been down to look for some brandy, and had lost her footing, and had been nearly drowned, right there in their own little sitting-room! I asked papa what little Janie said when she saw him come up; and he said she spoke as politely, as if she were in the street, "Good evening, sir!" Poor little dear! *She* told me that, dreadful as it all was, her first feeling was one of shame to see papa up there in their old chamber, and the great bag of carpet-rags all pulled open and scattered over the floor, when she had been in haste to stop the hole in the cellar—tidy little Janie!

Papa had thought to take brandy, and he managed to have them both swallow a drop, and then he told Janie what to do. He said she behaved like a little woman—my papa admires her wonderfully—that is what he does! Papa took a comfortable from the bed, and held Mrs. Graves up, and Janie wrapped it about her; and then he carried her down, and put her in the boat with a rubber-blanket around her besides, and one of the men held her while he went back for Janie. She had got herself all ready to be taken while he was gone, and then they rowed away, and

the rain still fell, and they were afraid the lanterns would go out, and they did have hard work to get to the mills, and papa said he expected the cottage would be carried away, and the flume was entirely gone. Only think, everybody else was abed and asleep, and not a soul knew till morning that the dams had given way, or that anybody had been in danger !

Dear, brave little Janie girl ! She sat up all the way, and held her mother's head, and shielded her from the storm ! But she did break down, and sob a few great sobs when papa took her down from the wagon, and they were both brought into the beautiful, blessed warmth and light of our home. I thought she would melt right out of our sight for a moment, she wavered so on her feet ; but in another moment she collected herself, and helped undress herself, and dress again in my warm, dry clothes — poor little wet, shivering bundle that she was, — why, she was all dripping ! She was quite ready to help when the hot bath was ready for her mother. She seemed to think she must still see to it all ; and she would help chafe the chilled limbs, and see with her own eyes that she was placed comfortably in the bed.

Mamma and I did not leave them all night. Indeed, it was hardly safe to leave Mrs. Graves ; for it seemed so often that she would die from utter weak-

ness. It was quite daylight when we left them both softly sleeping.

And then such an excitement as there was in the morning! I do believe that mamma's summer carpet—a white velvet ground, with moss and rosebuds—is spoiled, and I am very glad that mamma does not care. The whole town was here, everybody this side of the flats, certainly, and everybody with muddy feet, men and all; and some of them—that miserable Mrs. Ledyard, for one—seemed to think it *such* a wonder that they had been brought *here*, that papa was the one to go and rescue them, that mamma was personally taking care of Mrs. Graves! Mrs. Halliday and Mrs. Sumner did not appear so, although Mrs. Sumner spoke about their being taken to her house. But mamma said that they were here to stay until Mrs. Graves became well and strong.

But what they will do then is one of my puzzles. They little know how things are at their house. Papa and mamma have both been down there, and mamma told me that the cellar-wall would need to be relaid, and that all the carpets were ruined—those nice, queer rag-carpets, that poor Mrs. Graves and Janie labored so hard to make. The beds down stairs are spoiled, for nobody could go to dry things for a week or two, which made everything much worse. The

wall-paper is hanging loose, and completely mildewed. Besides, the meadows are ruined for this year, on account of the deposits of sand, papa says.

I am really weary with worry on their account. I asked mamma why they might not always stay here. But mamma says families cannot be taken into families harmoniously.





CHAPTER XIII.

A QUIET TALK.

"THE waters were abated from off the earth" at last, as in the days of Noah. The warming May sunshine, sweet and gentle as a dove, had brought a green leaf to every twig and stem in the Hollow.

Mrs. Graves could walk all by herself, out into the sitting-room. To-day she was sitting up, for the first time, during the entire afternoon. Her chair was in the sunny bay-window among the flowers. Mrs. Golden had driven down town to a dinner party, and Mrs. Graves, sitting alone, had had plenty of time for consecutive thinking. She had begun, by looking out on the laughing complaisant landscape, and wondering how Madame Nature had the face to ignore all she had done. It seemed rather heartless that Nature should always set to work to hide, cover, and beautify any

ruin she made of her own work, and grow taller and fairer on top of it. Even the plowed and wasted oat-field was green already with some useless but pretty growth. There were the full streams and lake-lets sparkling and dancing with swift current. There was a gem-like brightness and clearness in the blue of the sky and in the light. There was left no trace of storm and mischief.

Mrs. Graves felt weak at the sight, and longed, in a vague way, for just one spark of that courage and strength, that power of constant renewal for *her* work. Nature hadn't done a thing toward making good *her* losses. From the flowery bay-window on the hill-top she could see plainly enough that her meadows were spoiled. She could see her wee sunken hay-rick ; and her fences were flat with the ground. The little smokeless chimney of her house struck her mournfully. To-day, for the first time, she began to particularize in her sense of disaster and loss. She wondered what had become of her cow and of the fowls.

She rang her little hand-bell for Janie.

"Sis," said she, "how long have we been here?"

Janie's face is yet pale and pathetic. "Three weeks, mother," she says.

"So long as that?" Mrs. Graves wonders to herself whether they have or have not naturally become

a burden to Mrs. Golden by this time. To Mrs. Golden's credit be it recorded that Mrs. Graves is not at all sure that they have.

"Well, daughter Jane," she says, "I feel some stronger, and I think we must set about getting home. We've been took in upon rose-leaves to rest, but now it is high time to show ourselves thankful, and be up and away, and at it again."

"O, mother, mother!" Little Janie's silver-brown lashes sweep her pale little cheeks, and she goes away to a seat and hides her face.

Mrs. Graves almost breaks down to see how her brave little girl has lost heart, — what shall she do if she must do without her cheerful little daughter to lean upon? And what if this strange three-weeks' taste of a broad, generous life had made her simple courageous child forever discontented?

"You can't bear to go back — can you, childie?"

"I can't bear to take *you* back there, mother," cries the little girl. The little girl has been misjudged. She is sterling. She is all her mother has tried to make her. But now, in her lot there is enough to break down the heartiest of girls. It all comes out, presently, in a very burst of words.

"O, mother, we haven't any home — or any that's fit to live in, at least. You have got to know it, or else

how can you plan? The plastering is all falling; the paper is peeling off. There's mildew, and mould, and musty smells everywhere, — the very smells we never could abide, you know, mother. The cellar will *never* get over being wet and sticky; and atop of all this, mother, the wall is caved in in some places, and in some places it leans way in, and in some places way out, and there are great, long, crooked cracks everywhere. O, mother, it gives me a shiver; for it is just as it was in Mrs. Clennan's house in '*Little Dorit*,' before it fell. I just know ours might fall too; and, besides, I *can't* get it dry and sweet. Caddy and I have had a fire every day this week, but even the floor hasn't all dried yet. We never can live in it and be safe, and keep well. We should have a fever before summer is over."

A miserable tremulousness had got possession of poor Mrs. Graves. She felt the miserable spiritual ague in her very bones, — one long, deathly chill after another, with every fresh revelation from Janie's sobbing lips.

She questioned a little, faintly. The carpets were up, rinsed and dried. The bedding had been brought to the Golden laundry. Mooly was in the Golden pasture. Janie had been down to feed the hens, and had collected the eggs every day. She showed her

mother the money for them in a compartment of the little, faded, empty, old-family pocket-book.

The money for the eggs was all they had — all !

“O, what are we to do, indeed ?” Mrs. Graves had the hand of her faithful little girl in both her own, and as she spoke, she pressed it to her cheek, and kissed it, thanking God, in the midst of the desolation, for this brave little *compagnon du voyage*.

“We ought not to stay here, I do suppose,” said Janie. “Does Mrs. Golden say anything to you, mother ? She is so kind. I do like her so much, mother. Didn’t she say anything at all ?”

Out of her little stock of worldly wisdom, Mrs. Graves explained to her child that a rich woman couldn’t understand why any person shouldn’t be able to do anything at any time. “She would talk to us, daughter, like this, and think herself right sensible too : ‘My good Mrs. Graves, you will take a dangerous cold in that damp house. You must not think of going into it in its present state. You must have the cellar wall relaid, the old plaster removed, and the whole house freshly plastered and papered ; and while you are about it, I should advise that you have the cellar properly excavated, and either walled to the bottom, or else water-limed. Do you not see that you would be much more comfortable, my dear madam ?’ ”

Mrs. Graves had brightened, and quite entered into the spirit of the thing as she thus "took off" Mrs. Golden, giving her serene and gracious air to perfection. It was a bit of the dear, harmless drollery with which the observant cottage mother and her little girl used to entertain themselves ; and it had not the least touch of malice.

It cheered up Janie wonderfully to see her own mother so much like herself again. "O, mamma," she cried, quite like herself, too, "if you were only well we could go out into the world, and get a living somehow, and never go back home at all. As soon as you can walk, mother, let us take hold of hands and start out, and leave all this old patchwork behind us. I can see how we *could* do it, mother, and find somehow to pay our way under somebody else's roof, where it would be somebody else's lookout if the walls leaked, and they would have to see when the sugar was out, and get the wood, and pay the bills, and you and I just mind that we did our work well, and have our wages to make our own selves comfortable. Now, everything goes to hire work, or to buy things for Mooly to eat ; you and I don't have anything. I wish we could drop everything, and start out, mother."

Mrs. Graves concluded Janie was not much ener-

vated as yet, but, as she made no reply, Janie slipped back into the shadow presently. Back in the shadow there was no glamour. She knew then, though she was only a little girl, that her slight little mother was not able to earn weekly wages. Their little, quiet housekeeping for two quite taxed her strength. "Ma," she asked at length, "do you suppose Mrs. Golden has felt our being here?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Graves. "*I* should. She is a great deal better woman than I am. I couldn't take anybody into my house so, and go on quietly. I like to be alone with my own family. For all I can see, we might always have been part of her household. But we mustn't stay on and on, for all that, childie."

"Of course not, mother," said Janie.

"The future looks very dark," said Mrs. Graves. "I don't see what we are going to do. I never saw a time when our affairs seemed taken so entirely out of our own hands."

"If they are so quite out of ours, they must be in God's hands, mother," said Janie. It was no bit of sentiment; it was the little girl's honest reflection. In her own heart she went on to argue that when people grew to be homeless, like young ravens and sparrows, God put them in the same class, and took

them within the close care spoken of in her mother's Bible.

But the older head, resting heavily against the cushion, turned away from the comfort. "The day of miracles has gone by. Those that are helped help themselves, I notice."

"O, mother, you will feel different by and by. You are sick now. I don't expect big things, but even in our day one thing grows right out of another, just as steady and certain as can be; and if five loaves don't turn to five thousand in one minute right before our very eyes, they do, if you give 'em time, and watch things."

If we all only had the insight of those who believe without a question! Wise, simple, little Janie! God does, indeed, put in affairs a touch of something divine, awful, indeed, it may be, or blessed, it may be. There is a wondrous leaven, sometimes dropped into events, and to the eyes that can see, the five thousand loaves do rise straight from the five.





CHAPTER XIV.

AS CHRONICLED BY NEELIE CRANE.

WE were at Marion's last night — Lolly and me; and our mothers were with us. Mrs. Halliday seems to look on Lolly and me as a pair of firebrands that would blaze up and burn her roof over her head, if we came there without our mothers. I told mother and Mrs. Sumner, when we started, that they were invited as wet blankets to smother us out if we got to kindling.

Lolly says my eyes shine whenever I get talking of Mrs. Halliday. The minute I get excited, Lolly says, "Now you're mad! I can see your eyes shine!" Even mother — she likes Lolly dreadfully — has got hold of it. A dozen times a day I am admonished, "Now, don't let your eyes shine, Neelie!"

Yes, *Neelie!*

I want you to understand that I have seen all that

has been printed of the Cooking Club doings, and every time the printers have got my name *Nellie*; and how the Tu-Whit people have laughed, — and to plague me they all call me so. Gracious! do you suppose a girl like me would have a softie name like *that*? My name is Neelie, I would have you understand. Here, I will print it for you, Mr. Type-setter — N-E-E-L-I-E — and my “eyes shine” as I do it, too!

Now I’m myself for the first time!

Mother and Mrs. Sumner let us train all the way, that we might be “steadied down” before we got there, I suppose. I like to go visiting with mother. Our nicest evenings are at Lolly’s, when Mr. Sumner is off in another room reading those old *Tribunes* that men get to make themselves so awful wise and mystificacious. We are like four girls. Lolly’s mother and mine know how to be so sweet and so funny — mothers are so pretty when they are nice and sociable with their girls and their girls’ friends. I like Lolly’s mother almost as well as I do mine. I sometimes think she understands me even better. Now, Fan Ledyard’s mother is always so snappy, and so at odds with her children, even when she is doing everything in the world for them. I shouldn’t like mother to sew so many cross words into my clothes, I know.

Our mothers are first best company ; but I knew they would be stiff at Mrs. Halliday's. Mrs. Halliday has plenty to say, and she says it in a soft, even tone enough ; but yet she always makes everybody stiff ! Her pauses, for one thing, are dreadful. Who wants anybody, when they sit down around the fire, cosy-like, to wait when anything is said, and think it over, as if examining to see whether there was anything in it, before she answers ? I'll bet mother and Mrs. Sumner feel, when they are with Mrs. Halliday, as if they were two school girls, and she some great personage. I like anybody to answer up quick and warm ; I do so ! Then the talk goes right on, and everybody has a good, cordial time. Mother says wisdom is worth more than sympathy ; but I've seen mother with Mrs. Halliday, and she isn't mother at all.

I *can't* like Mrs. Halliday ! Who would like an eye that sees straight through you, and spreads that sort of light over you in which you appear dusty and guilty ? I like nice eyes, like mother's, that shed a warm, kind light, so that little girls look better than they really are.

I do wonder whether Marion will make such a woman as her mother. I wonder if that soft, sweet, even, placid manner could harden up, as she grows

old, into that set, self-satisfied way of her mother's! Marion sees when we go wrong; she sees through us equal to her mother. I wonder if she ever could get to be down upon a body for it! I wonder if to be wise and precise will some day seem better to our own dear, sweet Maynie, than to be warm, and hearty, and ready! O, I hope if it would—I *almost* hope she may never come back and grow up and we see her change; for if ever anybody was perfect, and could hush me down, it is my beautiful Marion just as she is now.

There was a small fire in the fireplace in the sitting-room, and Marion was sitting by it in her pretty gray wrapper, trimmed with pink. It was quite a picture, as she gathered up her dress to meet us, for her lap was full of some early wood-flowers the hired man had brought in when he came from work, and they all scattered at our feet, as she drew us close to kiss us.

The Wet Blankets had a table and a lamp to themselves, and Marion kept us with her down by the fireplace. She was just as sweet to Lolly and me as she could be. "It is *my* visit," she said. "I wanted you a whole evening, and I knew I couldn't have you, and send you away alone at nine o'clock; so mother invited the mothers to come and see you safely home, no matter how late I kept you."

Maybe that was it ; but Marion looked exactly as if she knew what I had thought, and was explaining it away. "And now I want to know about the Cooking Club," she said. "That pretty play of yours is not given up, — is it, little President ?"

"O, I don't know," said Lolly. "It will be pretty warm over the stoves soon, and then poor little Janie Graves is in such trouble. I saw her down at the old house all alone by herself to-day, crying as if her heart would break ; and I feel as if we had all better wear black than to have any more fun. I didn't know as I did like poor Janie so well !"

"Poor Janie, sure enough !" said Marion, but looking wonderfully pleased and bright as she said it. "Have you thought *how* poor, Lolly ? I'm sure I should be wild with thinking about it, if I hadn't also thought how we might help them. I'm ever so glad, girls, that you are so sorry for her, for now you will like to put them on their feet again."

"*We* ? — we little girls !" we both cried.

Marion was growing excited, too ; her cheeks were like flames all in a minute. "Yes, yes," she said, in an out-of-breath manner. "It all came to me in a beautiful flash, and mother said I might send for you two, for that you two were the ones that were strung together with telegraph wires, and would get the whole town astir by to-morrow night."

Funny compliment. Why couldn't Mrs. Halliday have said Lolly and I had "executive ability"? I always had so admired those two words. But, no! in a woman it would be "executive ability"; in little girls it is just "liking to run," and "love of excitement," and what old Grandmy Ledyard calls "hurrah boys!"

I didn't know a thing what it was yet; but I was jubilating aloud because it was something we girls could do, when what should I hear but "Talk slowly, slowly, Marion!" and Marion wasn't saying a word. The Wet-Blanket-in-Chief meant, "You crazy Nellie Crane!"

"Mamma knows if I get excited I shall cough, and not be able to tell you at all," Marion sweetly explained. "And she means that I tell you in a clear, business-like way. Well, I will. We all know that Janie and her mother can't live in the house as it is; and we know, too, that they have no money for repairs. It would need a great deal of money. I think the men of this community ought to see to it, and I think, too, that we little girls will have to be the ones to get it out of them."

Lolly and I both said we just as soon "go round with a paper" as not. I'll bet I would have a dollar from every person in this town, if we had gone round.

I sat there and thought just how I'd shame those great, stout men into it, — letting a widow-woman's house tumble down, and never lifting a finger! "Are those purse-proud Goldens the only Christians among us?" I was to inquire in my very most withering tone.

But, alas! it wasn't in Marion's plan that Neelie Crane should orate.

"No, we'll not beg," said she. "Mrs. Graves and Janie would never get over it. We must do it all in a beautiful, sweeping, enthusiastic way. You know about the Strawberry Festivals down at the village, and the New England dinners, and the Mush-and-Milk suppers. People seem to like giving their money in that way. Now we Cooking Club girls will do something original in the Charity line. Our mothers will help us what we need, and we will cook up all our receipts, and others too, and prepare one grand universal dinner. Then, your father, Lolly, is to ask the path-masters to appoint the same day all over town for the men to work on the road. Well, you know our lovely Koh-i-noor schoolhouse is in the very center of the town. We will have the desks and chairs removed, and set long tables that day, and all the men will come and buy their dinners of us Cooking Club girls. They will be so tired they will

be hungry as so many wolves, and they will just enjoy such a splendid Fourth of July kind of dinner. Mother says that without doubt we can get the whole town stirred up, and sell every crumb we can bake."

"Why, yes!" said Lolly, just squealing right out with joy the minute Marion stopped. "And besides all the cookery, there'll be the getting together that day, and the arranging the tables, and the trimming the schoolhouse, and seeing who'll be waiters, and there will be badges to decide upon, and we can look so pretty in aprons all alike, and each of us with a napkin, and the great bell will be rung, 'Come-a-ling! come-a-ling! ling! ling!' for dinner, and somebody will stand treasurer at the door,"—and here Lolly paused; and well she might. She hadn't left me a thing to say.

But Marion had something worth hearing even after all that. "Yes, and little Janie shall have a pretty verse of thanks to recite out there on the green, and we will all go—all we Cooking Club girls—to Mrs. Graves, and carry her the dinner-money, and say something nice. And now when can we have it?"

"That will be for the path-masters to say," said one of the mothers; and then they came down to the fire, and we talked until Marion was so tired she went over to the sofa and lay down. It was agreed it

should be, if possible, before Mrs. Halliday and Marion went away; and then we went home. I was so glad, for I did want to get out and decide what had got to be baked. How I always shall laugh when I think of that walk home. None of us shone particularly. Lolly couldn't seem to think of anything but a cheese. She kept saying there would have to be as much as a whole cheese! I was sure the baked beans were of much more importance. Lolly thought ten pans; but I thought twenty; and we got into such a dispute I actually felt my eyes shining. And our mothers were no good. They seemed as much mixed up as Lolly and me. Mrs. Sumner was talking away about where the coffee should be made, and mother didn't pay a word of attention, but kept saying there must be some whole boiled hams, and telling different ways to spice them.

I shan't put them down here, although I know you think the Cooking Club papers have turned into a story. Well, and what if they have? Didn't these things that have turned the papers into a story happen to the Club, and hinder them from cooking?

I'm going to bed now; and if I'm not up bright and early, and if I don't stir up this neighborhood tomorrow, my name may be hereafter printed *Nellie*, and I won't say a word.



CHAPTER XV.

CAKE AND SANDWICHES.

EVERYBODY had agreed to the neighborly plan ; and the week of weeks had come. Neelie Crane had been fearful "some mean old pathmaster would hold back and spoil it all." Neelie said "mean" when she meant "miserly," and "mean" when she meant "contrary," and "mean" when she meant "vexing." It is a funny way with other girls than my Neelie.

But the pathmasters, to a man, were as enthusiastic as the Cooking Club. They talked about it, and tossed their gray hairs and wagged their grizzly beards like so many boys, in fact. It was a funny combination, — the pathmasters and the Cooking Club. The entire town was waked up ; the only dissatisfaction was that the Cooking Club neighborhood should wish to give the entertainment without assistance.

The Cooking Club neighborhood thought itself quite competent—in fact, any one of the Cooking Club fathers was able to have given Mrs. Graves a little farm and not have felt it. Mrs. Golden, who had her spring clothes all sewed to go to the city to see about the summer suits to wear to the Centennial, stopped packing her trunk and heartily remained at home; and it was soon noised about that the mothers of the Cooking Club intended to take the matter in hand themselves, and it was to be the little girls' Cooking Club celebration, only in name; at least, this was what was said by some of the outside mothers.

Had they been anywhere excepting at the big house on the hill, I hardly think that this secret, which was intended to be such a delightful surprise to them, could have been kept from Mrs. Graves and Janie. But it was perfectly easy for Mrs. Golden and Caddy to preserve it. It is extremely comfortable and convenient sometimes to have all one's impulses, even the warm and generous ones, under control.

Although everybody looked unusually bright, unusually eager, and seemed, in some way, to demand a similar joyousness in herself and her mother, Janie simply wondered how they could, when they must know how their house stood down below, a sandy, mouldy old ruin. But as their trouble had plainly dropped

from people's minds, and as nobody spoke of it to her, little Janie spoke of it to nobody.

Oh, what a dreary weight of darkness and hopelessness that little girl did carry about in her heart! But since Marion and Mrs. Halliday, and Caddy and her mother, were deciding to wait until after the Cooking Club Festival, Janie thought she and her mother would wait too; and then they would, they *must* stir about and do something.

On Saturday the Cooking Club held what Neelie Crane termed a "State Pow-Wow." By the advice of the dear First Gold Stick, President Lolly had called the meeting, in order that they might know "what was what and which was which." Neelie said "which" was generally "t'other" unless you did.

It was at Mrs. Sumner's; and Mrs. Crane was there. Caddy and Janie both went down. Of course they must pass the deserted house. The gate and the fence still lay flat upon the ground. Neelie Crane had gone by a few moments before with her mother, and she had said, "It is a good thing,—let it lay! it'll set folks thinking, mebbe!" Not a spear of anything promising bread was growing upon the place. Janie's flower-beds were a drift of crusty sand—oh, how lonely the windows and the doors, the utter stillness of all the humble home-places!

Silently, and with wide-open eyes staring into the lovely day, little Janie walked on, her tears dropping like rain.

Caddy saw it at last. Her arm went about the child in haste. "Don't, Janie." The caress was as warm as a sister's. Janie cried on, harder than ever, but she squeezed Caddy's hand until all the pretty rings hurt.

"Never mind the old nest, Janie. Somehow I don't. There's a tender thought for you in the heart of the Father, I know. Remember now that I said this, Janie Graves."

This was the "warmest" Janie came to the little hidden secrets; yes, there was more than one,—the happy general secret, and the happier secret belonging only to two.

They found everybody there, Lolly sitting in state at her father's secretary, and looking both cross and official. The fun, they told Caddy, was already largely spoiled. The grand plan wouldn't bear reducing to details. Plenty of Cooking, but no Club. Mrs. Halliday had been down there that forenoon, and suggested that the big dinner would be more sure to be ready if each girl and her respective mother should cook an allotted portion by themselves. Neelie Crane's eyes flashed at the idea! As if beans could-

n't cook on top, and cake in the oven, and the sandwiches be spread anywhere! "If it's to be all work and no play, where's the fun?"

Lolly had tears in her eyes, but they flashed as sparkily as Neelie's, and on Neelie, too. "Neelie, you're a rod from the subject! You put things in such a light I don't wonder they're afraid to trust us with the dinner. Cake for a town dinner can't be baked in one oven, and I should think you'd know it!" And then she secretly "flew into inch pieces" herself, to think there was to be no fun.

"Anyhow," said Neelie, "it's got to be *some* as we say, or I *won't*! We are part of the committee as much as anybody—it's all in our name. Now I'll tell you what!—I'll stay at home and bake with my mother until four o'clock every day, and then I'm just going to go round to every girl's house and see the things. Mrs. Halliday hasn't got the rule over me in everything!"

"You may all do that," said Mrs. Sumner.

This plan was eminently pleasing; and Neelie admitted she shouldn't wonder if they got more done in this way than if the Club met.

"And now," said the President, "who will cook what? If there's no system we might all cook the same, and have thousands of some things and not a

smitch of others. For instance," — Lolly had always found it fine to say "for instance" — "men won't want to make a dinner out of just cake!"

"That's all *you* know!" said Neelie Crane. "They would just as soon as not — I know 'em. But, of course, we'll have beans," she added.

"Yes, and cheese, and all the flowers we can get. Father said the men would buy the cheese, and coffee, and table sugar. Now some one girl must take such and such cake, and some one else the rusk, and some one the beans, and some one the meats, and some one the fancy dishes, and everybody must bring pickles and table-cloths. The flowers are to be sent to Mrs. Halliday's, and Marion will make the bouquets."

"Yes," everybody said; but they knew there were no flowers to speak of, save a few tulips and hyacinths, unless Mrs. Golden sent them from her conservatory. Finally, Neelie touched Caddy's arm. "What say?"

"Me?" said Caddy, simply. "Why, you can have our flowers, of course. Besides, we shall be gone all summer, and I know mamma will tell Michael to cut them for you girls every week if you would like it. It would be so pleasant to think you were all enjoying them in the dear pretty school-house."

The guilty school-mates wished they could be as

easy with Cad Golden as Neelie was, — and Neelie had talked about her the very worst of them all!

Mrs. Crane told Neelie she might take the meats. "Yes, and I shall have to hack, hack, hack with the chopping knife, and grind pepper all day. We might as well take all the prose in a lump, mother, — we'll cook the beans, too, girls. Now go ahead with your poetry and romance, the rest of you!"

Miss Neelie looked very complaisant, however. She was extremely proud of their "potted veal," and of their delicious hams, and of their baked beans, and of their horse-radish sauce. She was, in fact, a genuine little Esau-girl for savory dishes, and had a natural Frenchy knack at seasonings and relishes.

"And what would you like to do at your house?" Lolly asked this very nicely of Caddy.

"Oh, I don't know," Caddy said. Then she added in the old, honest way the girls used to laugh at, but thought now to be so good and forgiving and true, "I think mamma would be entirely willing for me to take anything the rest don't feel like doing. Let the others choose, Lolly, and then you can see what I would better do."

"We shan't do any such thing, you sweet old Cad Golden!" cried Neelie Crane. "I know what you ought to make, and I don't care if it is the very sugar-

plums of the whole! Mother said this morning that *your* mother ought to oversee the whips and creams and fancy dishes."

"Well, mamma just as soon as not, I know," said Caddy.

Mrs. Halliday was to furnish the rusks. Fan Ledyard said they would make the doughnuts and gingerbread — "meanest and cheapest of the whole, of course," grimaced our Neelie behind Fanny's back, I am sorry to record. The cake was apportioned between the rest; and Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Sumner took all care of the tables and the coffee off the little folks.

No fun, but plenty of order and dispatch had been secured. The girls separated in good humor.

Neelie Crane ran after Caddy, and thrust her arm through hers.

"Cad, I like you! *awful* well, too!"

"That's good!" said Caddy, in her simple-mindedness, her eyes filling up with fine moisture, nevertheless.

"Caddy, if I get my work done, might I come up to your house and help about the creams? Would your cook care?"

"Oh, no. If she does, you and mamma and I will do them by ourselves."

"Could your mamma make things herself?" With Caddy, Neelie was not afraid at all to be perfectly simple-minded, too.

"Mamma! why, of course mamma knows more than cook. Do you think we could depend upon our cook for elegance?"

This, so honest, nearly quenched Neelie. She looked around, back at Janie, and "made up a face;" but it was not a very bad one, not nearly so bad as it used to be at Caddy's fine words.

"Could you bring sandwiches, Cad — those nice, nice ones you had at the picnic? I tell you, those were what I call high-toned. I've always teased my mother to ask yours for the receipt, but she won't."

"Well, you come up, Neelie, and you and I will make a million of them, ourselves. Our sandwiches *are* nice."

"Nice! I should think so! I hate some folks' sandwiches — great thick bread, and all the ham pull out the first bite!"

"I wish I had some part," said Janie. "It's all round me, but I ain't *in* it."

"She says she isn't in it! *she*! Do you appreciate that joke, Cad?"

Caddy hushed her quickly, for there was no being sure of Neelie Crane; but she, too, gave Janie a funny little smile.

Well, it was a most savory, flavorful time. The Diamond Bowl, up to its very rim, sent forth volumes of spicy incense; delicious oven-whiffs were blown clear to the village, some days, it was said.

The mother of the President, to particularize when every mother was baking her best, was as liberal and as girlishly-minded as Lolly could wish. No cake that Lolly mentioned was too expensive. They made, for one thing, great loaves of Mr. Sumner's favorite hickory-nut cake. Mr. Sumner himself staid in the house and cracked the nuts. He cracked a bushel, and they used all the meats, so you can rest assured there was plenty of that kind of cake. There were pans full of Florentines, and a row of cream cakes, and there were some very drop-py kind of drop-cakes, crumbly, soft, rich, tempting. And it was so pleasant to know that, at the same time, over at Mrs. Graham's, the blackest of fruit-cake was baking for pyramids, and that lovely silken flags had been bought to wave at the top of every one.

Then Lolly asked for "Butter Sponge Cake"—the real, rich, golden kind. Neelie Crane liked it so well she begged the receipt of Mrs. Sumner and sent it to me. "One cup of butter, two cups of sugar, one and one-half cups of flour, six eggs, half-tea-spoon soda, one teaspoon cream tartar. Dissolve the soda in one table-spoon milk. Rub the cream tartar in the flour."

When that was done, Lolly said if they could have cocoanut drops she should think, perhaps, they had done their part. It was now about two o'clock. Lolly had made the drops often ; so her mother left her and went into the sitting-room to rest. Lolly determined to have enough to "go round." That one tired child made nearly a thousand of those little sweets. Her arms began to ache before the cocoanut was half grated ; and the sugar was yet to be rolled *so* fine, and the whites of the eggs beaten *so* light — but, of course, things are expected of a President. With Lolly it was a case of *noblesse oblige*.

She was still at work when Neelie came. She said "Come in!" and never rose from her chair.

"Well, Mother Sumner," said Neelie, surveying her, "work goes hard with one at your age."

"Yes, but I don't care if I can see the chips fly. Go into the pantry, Neelie."

"Oh! Oh, oh! Oh!! Oh!!!"

Neelie came out, at last, munching, her hands full of Florentines and confectionery, and sat down.

"I shan't go, not to-night," said Lolly. "My feet'll drop off if I stir. Ar'n't you tired?"

"I don't care if I am. I am going to know what's been done."

But none of the girls appeared. Neelie sat there,

and, after a few moments, she was as old and worn and silent as Lolly. They both sat on either side of the stove, resting their chins upon their hands, elbows on knees, like two little old dames in a story. Lolly had her sweetmeats to attend to ; but when Neelie at last roused up to go home, the little back would scarcely straighten.

"Dear!" she cried. "I've chopped meat to-day until my arms seem going up and down now. Lolly, old woman, don't you wish, 'most, we had let 'em all help?"

"You've got to be rubbed, sir," said Lolly. "You are as red as a fever!"

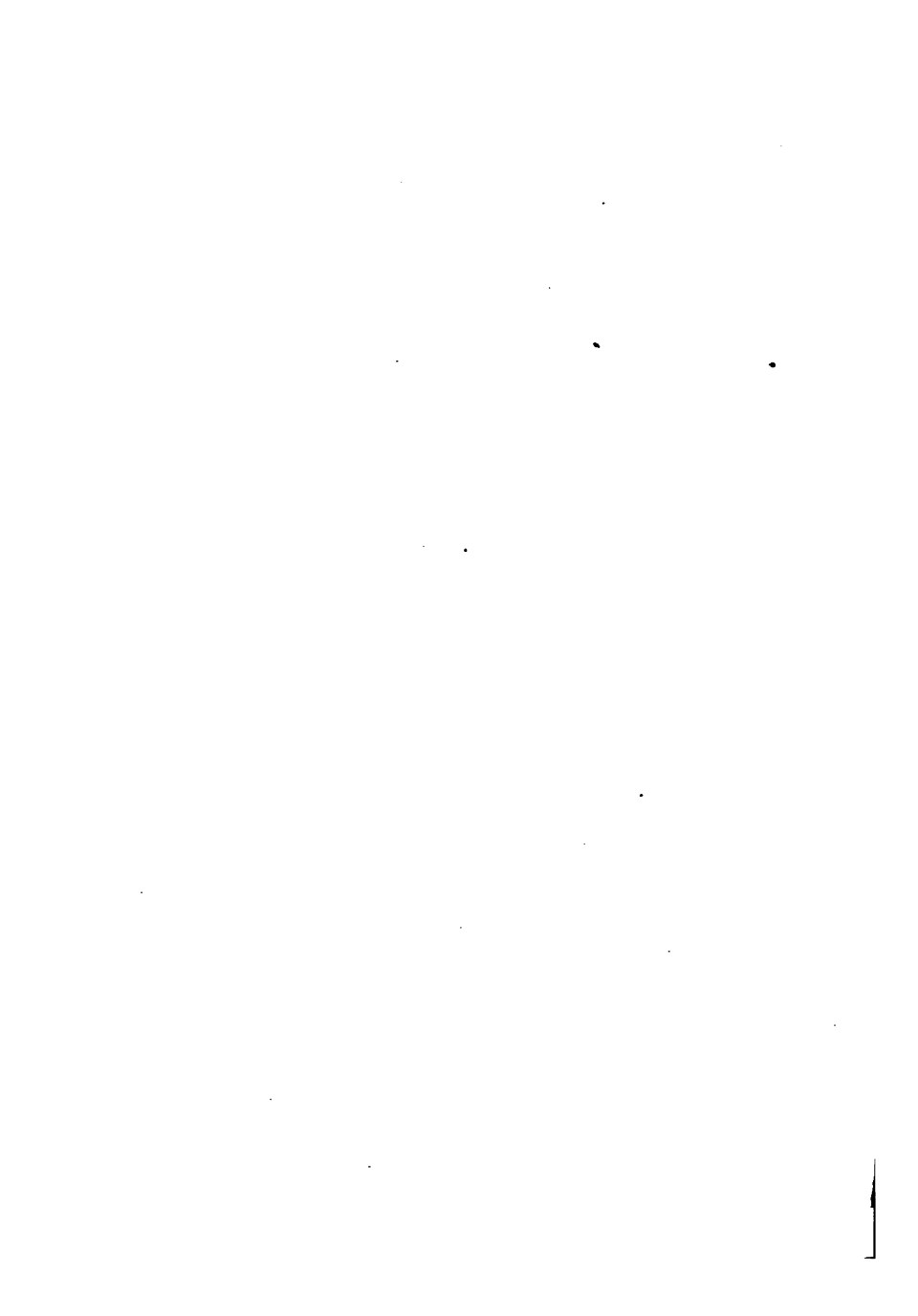
Poor Neelie was rather red and stiff. She had sat by Lolly's hot stove in a draft, until, now, her shoulder cracked like a pistol when she reached for her hat. She let Mrs. Sumner unbutton her dress without a word, and gladly submitted to the liniment and the heated flannel. Indeed, she was so meek and good that Mrs. Sumner was almost frightened about her.

She went off home at a good pace, however, and when she got there she said, "Do let me see what I've been killed for! I can't believe our pastry will begin to compare with Lolly's."

It didn't for show, although its fragrance was quite as delicious.



Tired out. Page 202.



There was nothing daintily pretty. But as Neelie lifted the white napkins from the cooked hams, crusty with golden-brown bread crumbs, they looked quite fit to have been placed upon a king's table in the famous old days of honest, hearty feasting. Then she uncovered three savory pans and sniffed at them, and revived wonderfully. Her mother's "potted veal" was as famous as Mrs. Golden's sandwiches.

"I'll send this and the hams to Boston," Neelie said, sighing with weariness and satisfaction.

But she didn't. Not a slice of the ham or of the potted veal accompanied these receipts, and the MS. of the next chapter. Perhaps Neelie simply meant she would send the receipts.

POTTED VEAL.—Three and one-half pounds raw leg of veal chopped, one heaping table-spoon salt, *ditto* black pepper, eight *ditto* pounded butter crackers, three *ditto* cream, piece of butter size of an egg, two eggs, one nutmeg. Mould into a loaf, and put into a pan with a little water, and sprinkle over it bits of butter and some more pounded cracker. Bake two hours.

TO COOK A HAM.—Boil three or four hours, according to size, then skin the whole, and fit it for the table; then set it in the oven for half an hour. Then cover it thickly with pounded bread crumbs, and set it back for half an hour longer.



CHAPTER XVI.

AS CHRONICLED BY NEELIE CRANE.

WELL, now, if I haven't dipped into the sweets of life to-day! I feel like a little wild field-bee flown over into a great flowery pleasure-ground.

I don't wonder any more that Mrs. Golden and Caddy always look so complaisant. I should think they would!

I have been all over that house to-day from top to bottom. I've run and raced as mother would never have allowed girls in our house, I know. I've been getting some "art-education," as Mrs. Halliday calls it. There's no red, nor green, nor any other gaudiness left in me. Oh! there are so many grays, and so many pearly hues, and so many lovely browns, and so many soft blue and buffs, and it seems *so distinguished* to one now to have no paints and varnishes! This house is just a love of a picture, all shaded and

lighted with what Mrs. Golden calls "our own native forest woods."

I never, *never* shall like gay colors again. I told mother. She said she knew it. She said Mrs. Golden is a nice woman, but that she has so much to spread herself over, — so many friends all over the world, so many books, so many tastes, so much dressing, so many fine pursuits, besides her housekeeping and her family — that we can't expect to see much of her.

But it seems as if I got a great deal of her to-day. Mrs. Golden does give anybody an idea of "breadth," so does Caddy. Things and beautiful thoughts that would keep me wild for months are spoken of there as if they were as little as to go out to dinner. For one thing, Caddy is to go to the Centennial. The whole family have resolved to go, with as little *hulla-balo* as father goes to mill when we see the flour-chest is growing empty. Mrs. Golden merely says, "Caddy will be better prepared to go abroad for going to Philadelphia now!" My! Miss Caddy, it seems, is to go through one grand door after another. She never speaks of it, or seems to think of it, — I should fly from one house to another like a blaze, if it were me, until everybody was wild.

What thoughts I have had to-day! If Caddy

Golden had not the very sweetest, meekest heart in the world, she never would have anything to do with us girls. She doesn't need us! What does she want of *us*? What can *we* do for her? She and her mother speak of things of which I never heard before. What is a *cosmopolite*? I should like to know. Mrs. Golden said to Mrs. Barrows, to-day, the rector's wife, from the village, that she hoped Caddy would never be narrow, *but a true cosmopolite*! I heard to-day, for the first time, that Caddy goes from Philadelphia to her uncle's, where she studies with her cousins under private teachers for two years, and then they are all going abroad for years and years! And we here have always loved Caddy so much, and treated her so well! She'll be glad some day to come back among her old school-mates — oh, yes! without a doubt!

If the basement people are sick, or anything, Caddy'll go down and wipe dishes for the cook, or make beds, or dust, — it is all one whether she is busy so or playing Beethoven music. I saw something in her eyes to-day, at the piano, when we were alone, and she was playing on and on, that was perfectly divine.

There are so many large and lovely things in Caddy's life that I do believe I should have lost all interest in the grand catouse down at the school-house if it

hadn't been that Caddy and her mother seemed quite as anxious about that as about anything. They want everybody to remember it as a most beautiful time.

I meant to learn a great deal about making fancy dishes, but I didn't. Mrs. Golden was down stairs with us, and I was so taken up with her talking in such an everyday way about all the things so high out of reach of common folks that I did just what she told me to, and never noticed at all what went with what. I know everything we made had what I call "such a foreign taste."

Mrs. Golden is sort o' after my own heart. She likes custardy dishes like me. Everything was sweet and creamy. Caddy calls her "*Mrs. Laudersdale*." I wondered what she meant, and she said, "Oh, it's a story in the *Atlantic*; Mrs. Spofford wrote it, and it always makes me think of mamma!"

The explanation made me dreadful wise, I must say. *The Atlantic*! but I'll bet Caddy does read it.

The beautiful trifles and creams and jellies got made some way; and we helped ice some lovely hot-house grapes, and the harlequin jelly was pretty, I tell you! I have no idea how anything was made, though, excepting the sandwiches. Mother wouldn't have forgiven me if I hadn't learned that. Caddy and I

chopped cold ham, ever so much of it. Then we chopped some fine, crisp pickle. There was about one table-spoonful of chopped pickle to a quarter of a pound of the ham. and a tea-spoonful of mustard and a pinch of cayenne. Then she stirred some butter in a skillet, about six ounces, she said, to the above, until it was creamy. Then we cut up some cold roast beef, and some cold chicken and cold veal. Then we laid this fine, shavingy meat on bread cut *very* thin; no crust, and spread it with the hot ham-dressing, and put it together with the other slice. We cut them into pretty squares, and such sandwiches as these are better than all the cake that was ever made.

I saw Mrs. Graves. She looks perfectly heart-broken. But Mrs. Golden says, "Never mind, it is almost morning." Mrs. Golden says she thanks God for riches every day. It sounded beautiful, and her face was all but as sweet and simple as Caddy's when she said it, and at the time I thought she was an angel. But, dear me, I don't know! The things she's made are not nearly so costly as what Mrs. Sumner, or almost any one of us, has done. Oh, dear!

The girls haven't been round. I guess they find that getting dinner for the whole town is something like work! Oh, dear! I don't believe that school-house has been touched, yet — and I don't care if it

hasn't, so! Nor the badges! No, nor who's committee! Nor who's to present the money! Mercy me! I think I shall enjoy the good, old-fashioned picnics, when we have another, where the mothers do all the work!





CHAPTER XVII.

AS RELATED BY NEELIE CRANE.

WELL, it is over with, all excepting the happiness and the good. It was so much better than any picnic. When everybody gets their own dishes, and knives, and spoons again, and the stains are taken out of the tablecloths, a picnic is over with for good and all. And what's the use? You go down to the grove, and you find a stray nail where the benches were set up, and some chicken-bones on the ground. But my! there's something to see and get hold of, after this Cooking Club outing—this "Happy Thought" of Maynie's, this day that Cad Golden has made beautiful, for ever beautiful. Mercy! I feel as if I could write poetry; and I'll bet it wouldn't be such stuff as Lolly spoke yesterday! If I wrote poetry, I should want it to be the wing-y sort, that would sweep you away from com-

mon things, and make you long for lovely kinds of life, such as Cad's and Mrs. Golden's.

Dear Marion has gone. They went this morning. It wasn't to Florida, — they don't expect to go there until winter, — but to Minnesota. All we Cooking Club girls have the loveliest white frilled aprons of her own making, and our badges. She gave each of us one, a little badge-breastpin: such a funny star, a little gold spoon, and a little gold fork, and a little gold knife criss-cross, with a little gold bowl in the centre, holding all fast. She had them made to order, and we didn't know a thing about it; and yesterday morning, when we all got to the school-house, she tied on our aprons with her own darling hands, and gave us our pins. Wasn't it lovely of her? Only, as they went by this morning, down to the village to take the cars, stopping at everybody's gate, I felt as if the gifts were coffin-flowers; they were meant for long, long good-byes, I know — dear little "remember-me's."

I woke up yesterday morning so fidgeted and unhappy. To be sure, I wasn't President, but I felt so guilty, so ashamed of smuggling myself out of the work down at the school-house, and staying all day long up at Mrs. Golden's. I felt as I do when I have hurried through and finished a story-book, for which

I have let everything go — so feverish, and so dissatisfied with myself.

But it seems the world would go right on if Neelie Crane hadn't a finger in the pie at all. Everything had been done, everybody had worked like a dog. The dishes were there, table-cloths and all. The school-house was trimmed, the desks were out, the flag was up and flapping, the tables were built, and committee to wait on table all chosen, and I was treasurer. Even the piece to speak at Mrs. Graves' and Janie was composed. But mother let me fret about these things all the way down there, that I might see the good of fretting, I suppose.

Things were not exactly as I expected. For one thing, there were no plate-bouquets for each of the men, as I had planned. There was one great center-piece of hot-house flowers on each table, and the rest was a bed of moss with vine-rims for all the dishes, and then the vines branched out and lay between all the men's plates. There were no flowers anywhere else, and I did see the difference between these green tables and the "spotty" look a table gets with little dabs of flowers put about anywhere. Caddy said it was "massing the effect."

There was a world of young, early, summer greenery on the walls and about the windows, — no crowns and

anchors and mottoes, and all that, but simple bowery effects, so that one thought of forest glades, and what a nice, green, cool atmosphere to come into, out of the sun, instead of thinking how ingenious the wreaths and rigmaroles were, and what a lot of work it all must have been.

Mrs. Halliday and Mrs. Sumner were talking, and Mrs. Halliday said there was a great difference between "ingenuity" and "art." Mrs. Sumner said "Yes" in a dozed way; and then Mrs. Golden said the most ignorant man would feel the difference between the cool, green grotto-look of the house and the usual fanciful ornamentation; and that that showed to her there was plenty of genuine "art-feeling" among the common people: if they didn't know how to produce the "effects," they enjoyed them all the same. Just so Mrs. Golden. Neelie Crane, for instance, makes a muddle of writing about what you said, but she knows what you meant very well.

"Bless us!" I heard that mean Mrs. Ledyard say to Mrs. Graves. They stood a little back. "Some folks like to talk fine. Who couldn't darken a room with bushes, higgledy-piggledy? For my part, I like to see some taste and head-work!"

But didn't the men enjoy the "darkened room," though! It was an awful sunshiny day. Under the

trees outside were long benches set with hundreds of wash-basins, and on the green branches overhead were hung thousands of white towels ; well, no, not arithmetic thousands, but girls' kind of thousands, — *plenty*, you know. The yard was just full of men and boys from all over town, and they had a good chance to appreciate their old bare school-houses, and see what it was to have trees set out, and to have a fence. Our school-grounds are like a park.

All up and down the road fences, the tired horses were eating hay out of the wagons — it looked like business, I tell you. We had a stove set up in a funny little shed, the pipe coming out through the roof, and the coffee was made out there. Two tables stood in the covered veranda, and Mrs. Sumner and Mrs. Ledyard had that place to pour coffee.

But when I saw such a sight of men, and Mrs. Golden said now the treasurer must go to the door to take the money, and the bell began to ring, and they started to come in, I couldn't help hanging back. Lolly gave me a push and sent me along, but my cheeks flamed up hot as fire, and the girls said they never saw my eyes so black and big.

Everybody had said the men would think it very pretty to pay the price of the dinner to a little girl, and the money would be willingly dropped into her

little hands; but by the time half a dozen had left their fifty cents, fifty cents-es, made up of two twenty-fives, and five tens, and ten fives, and a twenty-five and a ten and a five and ten coppers, the little girl wanted something besides her romantic little hands. Lolly whispered me to hold up my apron, like a flower-girl in a tableau. I thought I saw myself holding up my pretty white apron — Marion's gift — for all that dirty money, smelling so horridly of tobacco and everything else! I do wish we ever could have our own clean white silver money again! Not much I didn't hold up my sweet, white apron! I just snatched a tin pan, and held it out. Artistic or no artistic, it was just the thing; and didn't it look funny — a great tin pan full of money?

I did really have a panful. But it wasn't such a very nice sight. It didn't look much more like Mrs. Graves' happiness than a fresh-sowed posy-bed looks like the after-show of gay flowers. Still, it was a very suitable way for the Cooking Club to measure its money — in a tin pan. It looked like a lot of withered-up green leaves. I felt like tossing it up with my two hands, and sprinkling it over the room, — it was so funny, loose in a pan; and I fussed with it so long I didn't get to wait on tables much.

But the rest went straight about their duties, back

and forth, in and out, cross over, and reach and hand, and bow and smile, like some funny, old-fashioned dance ; and I stood looking at them and sifting the money through my hands, until first I knew the dinners were done, and I hadn't got it counted, nor ready for Lolly at all.

Caddy had to help me, and we got it into a bundle the best way we could. Then Caddy went out and jerked the bell — “ringing in the good times for Mrs. Graves and Janie,” Maynie said.

Lolly stepped out from the table then, and said everybody would please remain in their places during the ceremony. I felt like a grimace all over — Lolly is so consequential when she “appears in public.” But everybody else entered into it, and the men all turned round, and stood facing Mrs. Graves, though I know she didn't think anything even then — not a thing, until Lolly came up and got the money, and went up to her and said the verse.

“ And now, Mrs. Graves,
As your part in these happy labors,
Your friend Lolly craves,
In behalf of your friends and neighbors,
That you will kindly receive
This money as a friendly token
That you no more are to grieve
Over the home so sadly broken ;

For this will mend cellar, and this will mend wall,
And this will buy hay, and, I hope, will recall
That you are beloved and respected by all —

Quick! she's fainting away!" and, dropping the money all over her, Lolly seized poor, white Mrs. Graves by her shoulders, and held her up, while Mrs. Sumner with water, and Mrs. Golden with smelling-salts, flew to her side.

"Heaven have mercy on me!" gasped the poor woman, as she caught her breath.

Mrs. Golden looked down in her face and laughed. Mrs. Golden has a splendid laugh, just as bright and hearty as if she were a common woman. "Don't take it to heart so," she said. "Is it so very strange that a great prosperous family should see to their one stricken sister?"

"But, O, how can I ever repay you?" she gasped, helplessly, at Lolly, as if Lolly had done it all.

"Why, as to thanks," said Mrs. Golden, "everybody has just had his pay in full; there has been no giving about it. Don't you see?"

Actually, by some hocus-pocus, she made it appear that nobody was giving anything.

"*Shall* I take it, sis?"

"O, mother!" said Janie. She hid her face on her mother's shoulder, and then they both sobbed.

Lolly picked up the money and tied it up tight in some paper, and handed it to her again ; and Mrs. Graves took it at last, and then she told Lolly that she never, *never* could thank her enough. Lolly was very uncomfortable and embarrassed, and I was glad of it, for she did feel so big because she composed that piece of poetry herself — stuck her own name in it, too !

Janie had the most sense of anybody. They were all star-gazing at poor Mrs. Graves, and Janie told Mrs. Golden she wished somebody would thank them all for their kindness. So Mrs. Golden, in her most beautiful voice — her voice is delicious when she speaks to people on purpose — “addresses” them, I suppose, the word is. Her voice has so many different tones and shades. I see colors and hear a tune — I’ll bet, if it could be printed on a bar of music, it would have notes like a tune. She said that gentlemen were very kind to gratify the Cooking Club girls by buying their dinner, and it had enabled the girls to do a most pleasant thing for one whom they all respected and wished to keep in their neighborhood, and as the benefit had been equal on both sides, the day would be delightful to remember.

How nicely she did make it seem that it was no charity at all, and that if anybody was obliged it was

the Cooking Club ; and poor Mrs. Graves was really relieved, and began to brighten up.

And then one of the highway commissioners made a very polite speech to the Cooking Club, but all the while bowing and scraping to Mrs. Golden, and said the kindness was on the part of the young ladies, and that the little side-dish they had cooked for Mrs. Graves was the most delicious of all, and everybody had enjoyed it the most, and he hoped Mrs. Golden would consider this speech as from every man in the house. Then he bowed, and Mrs. Golden bowed, and Lolly she bowed too, on account of her being president, I suppose ; but as she stood behind him, the commissioner didn't see her at all.

But nobody but me seemed to see anything comical. Everybody in the house looked overjoyed, even to Mrs. Graves and Janie, though they were crying ; and then the men poured out.

When they got outside, it was all still for a minute, and then such a great, pretty musical hurrah as there was, — every man in one voice, in perfect time, just as heartily and delicately as he could, — three times. I. didn't know as men could do anything so pretty and in such order.

Then off they went for their teams, and in ten

minutes we girls and our mothers had sole possession of the place.

And now, don't you think if this had been all, it would have been plenty?

But there was something more. It wasn't quite that first minute, nor in the schoolhouse at all. It was out under a tree, as quiet, and sweet, and simple as Caddy always is. It was Maynie, and Janie, and she ; but they let me come, some way. Lolly was president-ing around the tables, and saying whose spoons were whose, and putting girls to do this and to do that ; and Fanny and Effie were getting a table ready for our own dinner, and everybody was talking to Mrs. Graves, so nobody missed us.

We were all four out under the tree. Caddy had got Janie, and nodded to Maynie and at me to come. Janie's poor little bosom was still heaving with sobs. Maynie held her to her side, and then she said, "Now, Janie, can you be a little woman?"

"A very little woman, maybe, I might," said Janie, with a quaint smile. "But we've been taken care of so long like little children, we can't help it if we do cry."

"Well, dear," said Maynie, "*you* are young and strong, and so we thought the rest of this trouble better come on your shoulders alone. You see, there's

more of what you have just been through. Caddy has got something for you, Janie."

"Something for me?"

And the same minute, — O, you Wide Awakes, it was a most beautiful minute when Caddy took her hand out of her pocket, and there was a big paper with some seals, and some big men's writing—county clerks and such men. And she shut Janie's two little trembling hands over it, and then she put her arm around her and hugged her there under the green school-house trees, and said, "Now you have a good, safe home."

And Maynie kissed them both, and her arms took me in.

It took Janie a long time to understand ; it quite came over me, too. But Mrs. Golden had said from the first that the same trouble might happen again, and she never should be able to rest if she should drop them back down in the bottom of the Diamond Bowl ; and the great country estate was hers any way ; so she had deeded the pretty little fruit lot and its wee white cottage, that stood near the big house, to Janie. It is ten acres of orchard and small fruits, with a cunning barn, and a cunning meadow, and a cunning little income from the fruits. It has a drying-house, and all.

Mr. Golden didn't care what his wife did with her own property, and so Caddy had the deed to give to Janie as a good-bye gift. Wasn't it perfectly sublime? If you are going to call anything earthly sublime, let it be such things as these, I say.

We told little Janie not to lisp a word to her mother till they went to bed at night, and we girls kissed her little frightened face dry of all its tears, and then we walked about a little with our arms around each other, and then we went in.

Caddy's mother took us all in at a glance. She had been watching for us, I guess. She looked down upon us as an angel might, that had been commissioned to make some one perfectly happy, and then went on washing dishes, as if a farm, or four thousand dollars' worth of property, were only one or two of her many beautiful and costly trifles.

We all stayed at the schoolhouse until near sundown. Maynie had a little couch of shawls and things, and we heated water out in the shed, and washed dishes, and had a beautiful little supper just at night, and we laughed, and visited and chirked up Mrs. Graves, and I know she never felt for a moment like a poor charity neighbor.

Next week Caddy and her mother are going; and Maynie and *her* mother have gone already; and Janie

and *her* mother are to move into their new home with their cow and their chickens, and their gratitude and their cosiness, snug and high and dry on the sunny very outer rim of the Diamond Bowl ; and the rest of us and *our* mothers shall settle down to the dear humdrum old times, I suppose.

But Lolly says she is perfectly satisfied. She says we have all been amused, and had a good time. We heard that Mrs. Halliday said the clubs were not at all what she expected them to be, nor what they might have been, if they hadn't been left to degenerate into mere girls' fun. But I don't care a copper for Mrs. Halliday ! I don't suppose any of us could keep house yet, but we can do some things ; and, as Lolly says, her mother planned the clubs not as work, but that we girls might have a good time. . *And we have had it.*

Good-bye.

THE END.

WORD PICTURES. Thoughts and Descriptions from Popular Authors. Boston: D. Lothrop & Co. Illustrated, Price \$1.75.—Gilt edges, \$2.00.

This volume is inscribed by the author to "the Memory of My Beloved Mother, Margaret Guthrie Strohm, and of the happy days when we read together." A note of acknowledgment to the authors and the publishers represented, answers as a preface to this compilation. One hundred authors are quoted, among whom many are well-known to all, as Grace Aguilar, Louisa M. Alcott, Charlotte Bronte, Bulwer, Dickens, Disraeli, Amanda M. Douglass, Edward Everett Hale, Hawthorne, Victor Hugo, Jean Ingelow, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Charles Reade, Mrs. Stowe, and Bayard Taylor. There is no lack of deep meanings in this collection, and of course all the popular authors could not be represented in a small volume. Forty-two pages of the three hundred and fifteen are devoted to various subjects under the title "Thoughts." The remaining pages are classed "Descriptions and Scenes."

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